

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University
Washington, DC



June 2024

Thu T. Do, LHC, Ph.D.

Lavina Rodrigues, A.C., M.A.

**Women and Men Entering Religious Life:
The Entrance Class of 2023**

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Major Findings	2
Introduction.....	6
Interpreting this Report.....	8
Part I Characteristics of Responding Institutes and Entrants.....	9
Institutes Reporting New Entrants in 2023	9
Gender	10
Age of the Entrance Class of 2023	10
Region or Country of Birth and Age at Entry to United States.....	11
Race and Ethnic Background.....	12
First Languages and Fluency	13
Religious Background.....	14
Family Background.....	16
Discussions about Vocations While Growing Up	18
Education Level Before Entering a Religious Institute	21
Catholic Education Before Entering a Religious Institute.....	20
Employment Before Entering.....	21
Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries.....	23
Part II Vocational Discernment to Religious Life	26
Attraction to Religious Life	26
Attraction to a Religious Institute.....	28
Helpfulness of Discernment Programs and Experiences	30
Consideration of a Vocation to Religious Life.....	33
Influences on Decisions to Enter Religious Institutes.....	35
Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute.....	39
What Most Attracted Entrants to Their Religious Institute	42
Part III Experience of Religious Life and Religious Institute	50
Prayer Practices.....	50
Importance of Aspects of Community Life.....	52

Wearing Religious Habit	53
Evaluation of Aspects of the Religious Institute	55
What Entrants Find Most Challenging about Religious Life.....	58
Appendix I: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies.....	63
Appendix II: Responses to Open-ended Comments.....	72
<i>Q. 140: What most attracted you to your religious institute?</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Q. 141: What do you find most challenging about religious life?</i>	<i>78</i>

**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University
Washington, DC**

**Women and Men Entering Religious Life:
The Entrance Class of 2023**

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from an annual national survey of women and men religious who formally entered a religious congregation, province, or monastery based in the United States during 2023. To obtain the names and contact information for these women and men, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) contacted all major superiors of men and women religious institutes in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every person who entered the institute (for the first time, as a postulant or novice in institutes that do not have postulancy) in the United States since January 1, 2023.

After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 508 of 737 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 69% among religious institutes. In all, the major superiors provided contact information for 279 members (126 women and 153 men) entering religious life in 2023.

In November 2023, CARA emailed or mailed a survey to 279 identified entrants, asking them to complete an online survey or mail their completed paper survey to CARA. A total of 175 responded to the survey by February 1, 2024. This represents a response rate of 63% among 279 new entrants who were invited and eligible to participate in the survey.

Major Findings

Characteristics of Responding Institutes and Entrants

- Four in five (81%) responding religious institutes had no one entering religious life in 2023. Nine percent reported one entrant and 10% reported two or more.
- More than half (53%) are women and nearly half (47%) are men. Among men, almost nine in ten (86%) expect to become priests and just over one in ten (14%) plans to become a perpetually professed brother.
- The average age of respondents of the Entrance Class of 2023 is 29. Half of the respondents are age 26 or younger.
- Responding postulants were born in 21 countries. More than eight in ten (82%) were born in the United States. Among those who were born outside the United States, they were twenty years old when they first came to the United States and lived here for eleven years before entering religious life.
- Seven in ten of those who entered a religious institute report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian/European American/white (68%). More than one in ten of the Entrance Class of 2023 identifies as Hispanic/Latino(a) (13%) and Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (9%). Three percent identify as African/African American/black. Seven percent identify as mixed or some other race or ethnicity.
- Entrants report speaking 13 different languages, with English (81%) most frequently reported, followed by Spanish (8%) and other languages (11%).
- Nearly nine in ten (86%) have been Catholic since birth, with three in four (74%) coming from families in which both parents are Catholic. Almost all (96%) have at least one sibling and the most common number of siblings is one or two.
- During the most formative part of their childhood, almost all respondents were raised by their biological parents (96%) during that time, with one in ten raised by their grandparents (10%). Less than one percent were raised by stepparents. Nearly nine in ten were raised by a married couple living together (85%). Seven percent was raised by one parent who was either separated or divorced.
- Half (52%) report that it was easy for them to start a conversation with their family about their vocation. Men (63%) are more likely than women (42%) to say that starting a discussion with their family was easy for them.

- While growing up, six in ten respondents (62%) report that outside of family members, they got to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun. More than a quarter have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun (27%).
- The responding members of the Entrance Class of 2023 were highly educated before entering. Six in ten (62%) report having earned a bachelor's degree. Nearly a quarter received a master's degree, including 6% having a doctoral degree.
- The 2023 entrants are considerably more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic elementary school (46% compared to 16%), a Catholic high school (38% compared to 8%), and a Catholic college/university (37% compared to 5%).
- Many respondents were active in parish life and/or other religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute. Nearly seven in ten participated in retreats (67%), various types of voluntary work in a parish or other setting (57%), and campus ministry during college (55%).
- Before entering religious life, two-thirds of respondents were employed full time (67%) and about one in five was employed part time (18%).

Vocational Discernment and Choice of a Religious Institute

- Four in five say they were “very much” attracted to religious life by a desire for prayer and spiritual growth (98%), a sense of call to religious life (97%), and a desire to be part of a community (91%).
- Asked what attracted them to their religious institute, almost all of them report that they were “somewhat” attracted by the mission of the institute (95%). Nine in ten respondents report they are at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the community life, prayer life, example of members, and spirituality of the institute.
- Entrants were asked how helpful selected vocation experiences were to them in discerning their call to their institute before they entered. Eight in ten report those deemed “very” helpful by live-in experience (85%), contact with the vocation director (84%), visits to the Motherhouse (84%), spiritual direction (79%), and vocation or discernment retreat (75%).
- On average, respondents were 20 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life. More than nine in ten received encouragement from a spiritual director (94%), Vocation Director/team (92%), members of the institute (89%) and friends outside the institute (89%) when they first considered entering a religious institute.

- Asked to rate how much 13 aspects of their religious institute affected their decision to enter that institute, more than six in ten listed these as having had “very much” of an influence: the Charism of the institute (77%), community life in the institute (63%), prayer life or prayer styles in the institute (63%), the lifestyle of members (63%), and the institute’s practice regarding a religious habit (61%).
- Men and women entering religious life were asked to indicate how they first became acquainted with their religious institute. Three in ten report becoming acquainted through their own search (29%), through the recommendation of a friend or advisor (29%), through the reputation or history of the institute (26%) or in an institution where members served such as at a school (25%).
- New entrants were also invited to respond in their own words to an open-ended question: *“What most attracted you to your religious institute?”*
- Respondents shared many aspects of what most attracted them to their religious institute. The aspects include mission and ministries, the founder/ess, spirituality and charism of the institute, prayer life and communal prayer, community life, joy of the members, fidelity to the Church, its practice regarding religious habit, religious formation/lifestyle of the institute members, and sense of social justice.

Experience of Religious Life and Religious Institute

- Regarding the types of prayer that are important to them, more than nine in ten say that daily Eucharist (91%) and private personal prayer (87%) are “very” important to them.
- Asked how important five aspects of their community life are to them at present, eight in ten say these are “very” important to them: praying with other members (87%), living with other members (82%), and sharing meals together (79%).
- New entrants were asked if the members of their institute wear a habit. Nearly eight in ten indicate that members of their institute wear a habit (76%), with women (87%) more likely than men (64%) to say so. Among all of those who indicate that their members wear a habit, seven in ten indicate that the habit is required in all or most circumstances (70%) and a quarter report that the habit is required only at certain times (24%).
- Respondents seem pleased with the religious institutes they are entering. Asked about 20 aspects of their institute, all receive a “good” or “excellent” evaluation from two-thirds of their members. The ones most likely to be seen as “excellent” are the opportunities for spiritual growth (81%), opportunities for personal growth (79%), welcome and support of newer members (77%), and educational opportunities (75%).

- In written comments at the end of the survey, respondents shared a variety of challenges that face them in religious life, including community life, maturing into religious life, adaptation to religious life, decreasing access to family and friends, and other challenges.

**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University
Washington, DC**

**Women and Men Entering Religious Life:
The Entrance Class of 2023**

Introduction

In 2014, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University to conduct an annual survey of women and men who enter religious life each year in the United States. For this project, CARA was asked to gather information about the characteristics and experiences of these women and men in a fashion similar to the survey of perpetually professed that CARA conducts each year for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, which is released each year for the World Day of Consecrated Life in February. CARA designed a questionnaire based on previous CARA research on religious life and reviewed it with a representative from the Hilton Foundation. This report presents results of this survey of women and men of the Entrance Class of 2023.

To obtain the names and contact information for women and men entering religious life in 2023, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) contacted all major superiors of men and women religious institutes in the United States that were identified by the USCCB Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Each major superior was asked to provide contact information for every person who entered the institute (for the first time, as a postulant or novice in institutes that do not have postulancy) in the United States since January 1, 2023.

After repeated follow-ups, CARA received a response from 508 of 737 major superiors, for an overall response rate of 69% among religious institutes. In all, the major superiors provided contact information for 279 members (126 women and 153 men) entering religious life in 2023.

In November 2023, CARA emailed or mailed a survey to 279 identified entrants, asking them to complete an online survey or mail their completed paper survey to CARA. A total of 175 responded to the survey by February 1, 2024. This represents a response rate of 63% among 279 new entrants who were invited and eligible to participate in the survey.

The questionnaire asked these women and men about their demographic and religious background, education and family background, previous ministry or service and other formative experiences, encouragement and discouragement to consider religious life, initial acquaintance

with their institutes, and vocation/discernment programs and experiences. This report presents analyses of each question from all responding men and women.

This report is arranged in three parts: Part I describes characteristics of the institutes that responded to the request for names as well as characteristics of the Entrance Class of 2023. Part II describes aspects of the vocational discernment of the Entrance Class of 2023. Part III describes their experience of religious life so far and reports, in their own words, what attracts them to religious life and what they find most challenging about religious life.

Interpreting this Report

Many of the questions on the survey use four-point response scales (for example, “not at all,” “a little,” “somewhat,” and “very much” or “poor,” “fair,” “good,” and “excellent”). These scales allow half of the responses to be interpreted as relatively more “negative” (“poor” and “fair,” for example) and half as relatively more “positive” (“good” and “excellent,” for example). In parts of the analysis in this report, these responses are combined to allow for clearer comparisons. Tables summarizing responses to questions that use these scales usually report the percentage of those who responded to the two most positive categories combined (e.g., “somewhat” and “very much”), followed by a column of the percentage of those who responded in the most positive category (e.g., “very much”), since the most positive response sometimes distinguishes important contrasts in the level of support. This is especially useful here since many respondents tended to give “positive” responses but not always the most positive responses.

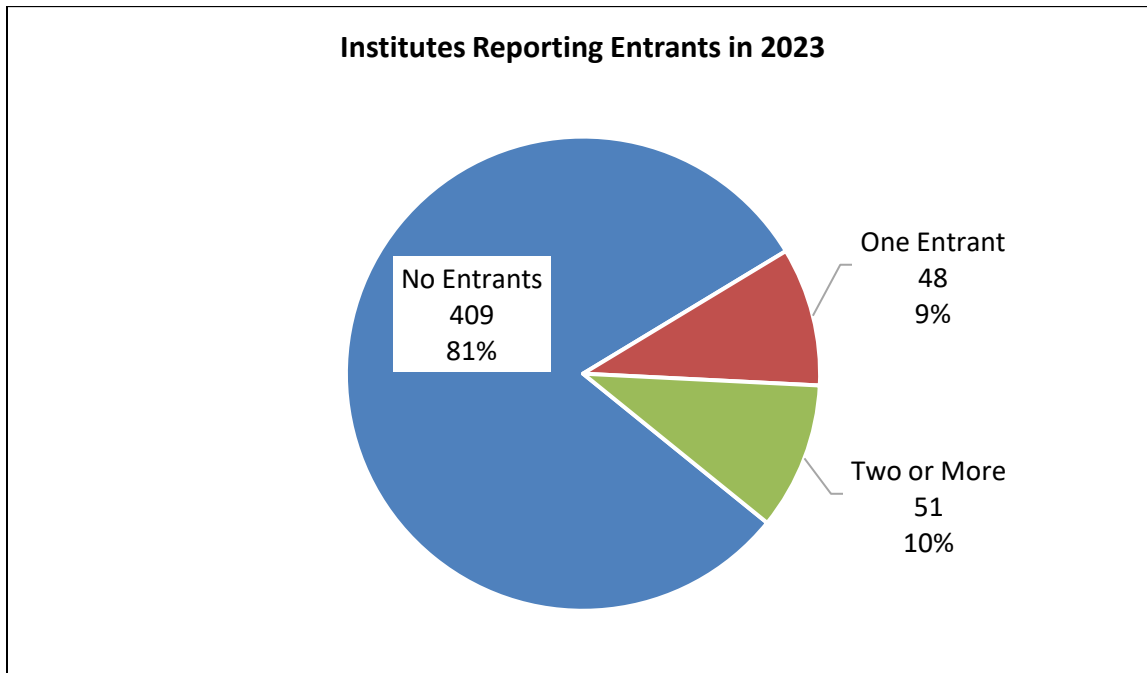
Readers may also wish to compare the difference between the two extreme responses, say “poor” and “excellent,” to compare the level of intensity with which opposing opinions are held. These comparisons and others may be drawn by referring to the actual percentage responses given in Appendix I. That appendix shows the percentage responses for each item, calculated out of 100%, as well as the percentage of all respondents that did not respond to each question, separately calculated out of 100% for clarity of comparison.

In general, in making comparisons between men and women, tables will show the overall percentage who provided a strong response, followed by the percentage of each subgroup (i.e., men and women) who provided a strong response. Whenever the difference in percentages between these groups approaches or exceeds 10%, this difference is considered notable or important.

Part I Characteristics of Responding Institutes and Entrants

Institutes Reporting New Entrants in 2023

CARA asked the 737 religious institutes, provinces, or monasteries in the United States to provide the names of men and women as postulants who entered their religious institute in the United States in 2023. A total of 508 major superiors responded (a 69% response rate) with 279 names of women and men. The Entrance Class of 2023 consists of 153 men and 126 women.



A total of 409 major superiors (81% of those responding) reported that they had no one enter the institute in 2023, another 48 major superiors (9%) reported one new entrant, and 51 major superiors (10%) reported two or more new entrants.

Gender

Among the 175 respondents who entered religious life in 2023, more than half (53%) are women and nearly half (47%) are men. Among men, almost nine in ten (86%) expect to become priests and just over one in ten (14%) plans to become a perpetually professed brother.

Age of Entrance Class of 2023

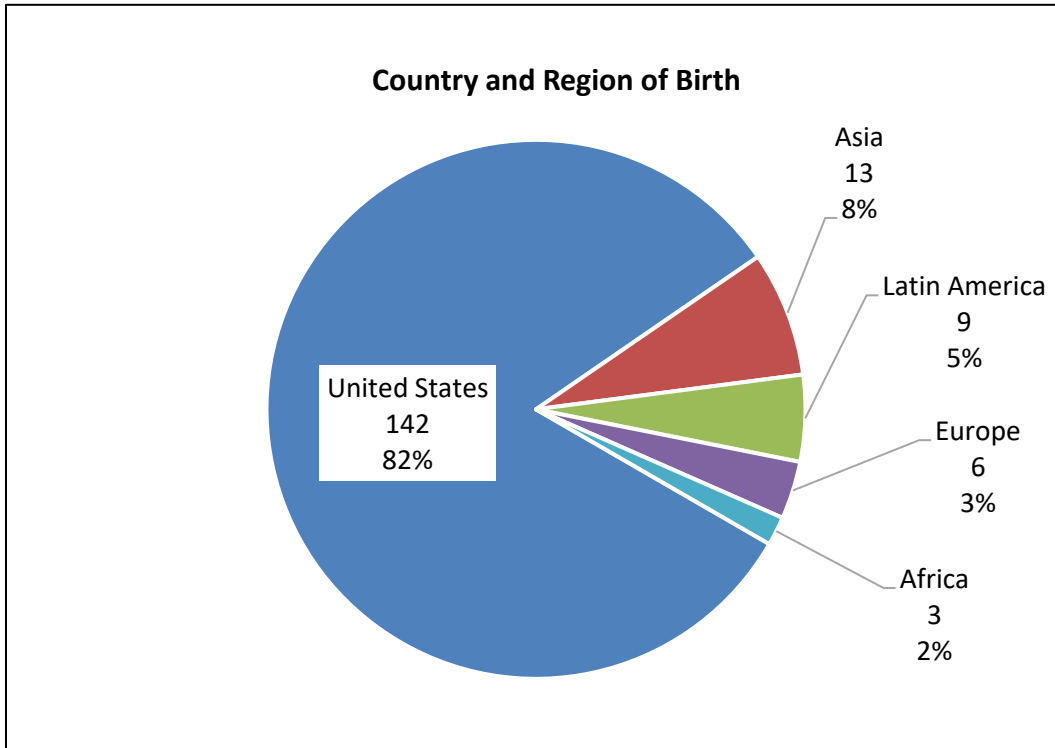
The average age of respondents of the Entrance Class of 2023 is 29. Half of the respondents are age 26 or younger.

Age of Women and Men Entering Religious Life			
Percentage in each age category			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
25 and younger	46	41	50
Age 26-35	42	49	37
Age 36-45	6	6	5
Age 46-55	4	4	4
Age 56 and older	2	0	4
Average age	29	29	28
Median age	26	26	26
Range in ages	18-68	19-54	18-68

The youngest responding sister or nun of the Entrance Class of 2023 is 18 and the oldest is 68. Among men, the youngest is 19 and the oldest is 54. Regardless of gender, almost nine in ten respondents (88%) are 35 or younger.

Region or Country of Birth and Age at Entry to United States

Responding postulants were born in 21 countries. Just over eight in ten (82%) respondents were born in the United States. One in six was born outside the United States (18%).



Respondents who were born outside the United States have lived in the United States for an average of 11 years. Half of them have been in the United States for 6 years or less.

	Entrance to the United States			
	<i>Years in USA</i>		<i>Age at Entry</i>	
	Overall	Overall	Men	Women
Mean	11	21	21	21
Median	6	22	21	22
Range	1-55	0-68	2-37	0-68

On average, responding foreign-born religious came to live in the United States at the age of 21. Half were age 22 or younger when they came to live in the United States. The oldest woman was 68 while the oldest man was 37 at the time they entered the United States.

Race and Ethnic Background

Two in three of those who entered a religious institute report their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian/European American/white (68%).

<i>What best describes your racial or ethnic background?</i>			
Percentage in each category			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Caucasian/European American/white	68	67	69
Hispanic/Latino(a)	13	12	13
Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	9	5	13
African/African American/black	3	5	2
Mixed race or other	7	11	3

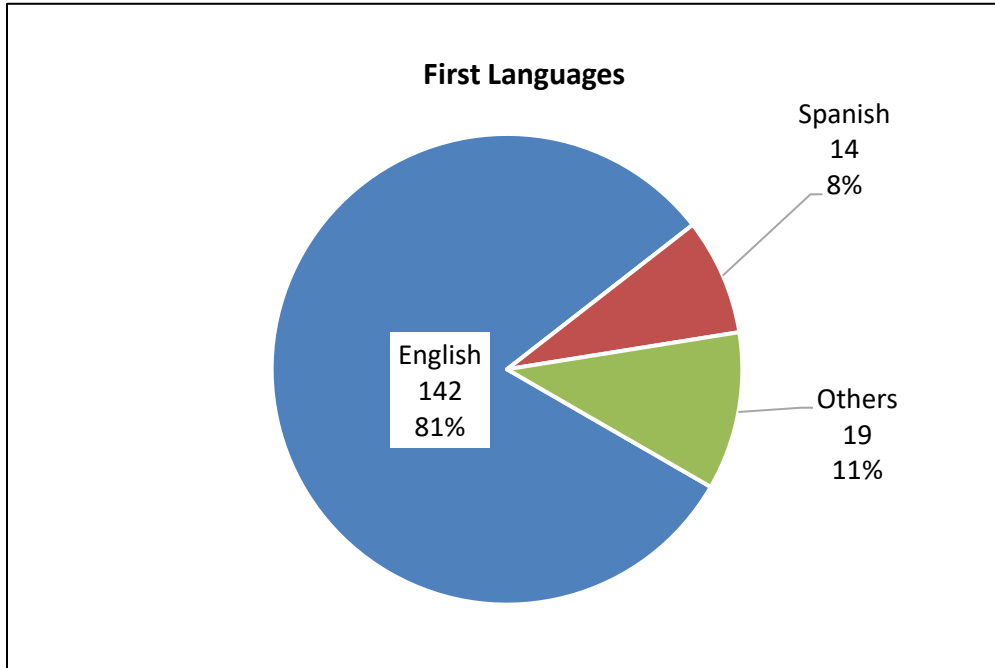
Just over one tenth of the Entrance Class of 2023 (13%) identifies as Hispanic/Latino (a). Another one in ten identify as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian; 3% African American/black; 7% identify as Mixed race or another race/ethnicity.

Differences by Country of Birth

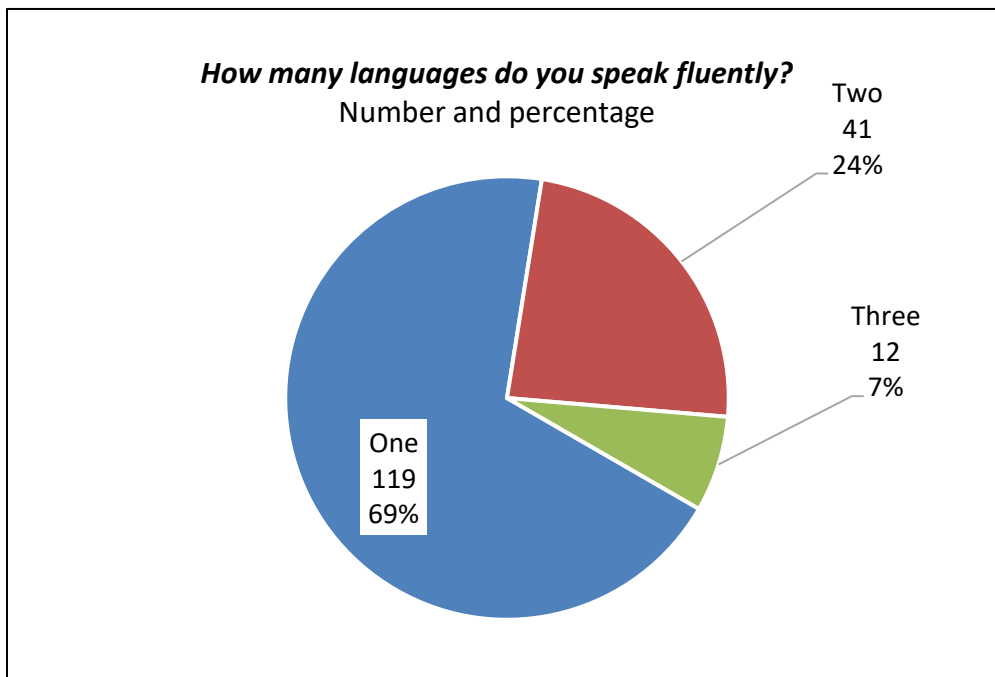
- Among those who were born in the United States, almost eight in ten (78%) report being Caucasian/European American/white.
- Among those who were born outside the United States, almost three-tenths were Asian/Pacific/Native Hawaiian (28%). Just over one in five Caucasian or European American or White (22%). One in six identifies as Hispanic or Latino (a), (16%). Just over one in ten identifies as African/African American/black (13%). Just over one in five of respondents identify as mixed and other (22%).

First Languages and Fluency

Responding entrants report speaking 13 different languages, with English (81%) most frequently reported, followed by Spanish (8%).



Seven in ten respondents speak fluently one language (69%), with a quarter (24%) speaking two. Seven percent speak three languages or more languages.



Religious Background

Almost nine in ten respondents (86%) have been Catholic since birth.

Catholic Background			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Catholic since birth	86	86	86
Became Catholic later in life	14	14	14

Among those who became Catholic later in life, 78% participated in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. These entrants came from a variety of faiths: Agnostic/Atheist, Baptist, Christian Church (DOC), Cooperative Baptist, Dutch reformed, Episcopal, Evangelical, Evangelical Christian, Non-denominational, Unitarianism, Jehovah witness, Lutheran, Muslim, Non-denominational protestant, None, Presbyterian, Presbyterian Church (USA), Protestant, Southern Baptist.

Three in four (74%) report that both of their parents were Catholic when they were growing up. Nearly two in ten report either their father or mother was Catholic while they were growing up. Nine percent report neither of their parents were Catholic while they were growing up.

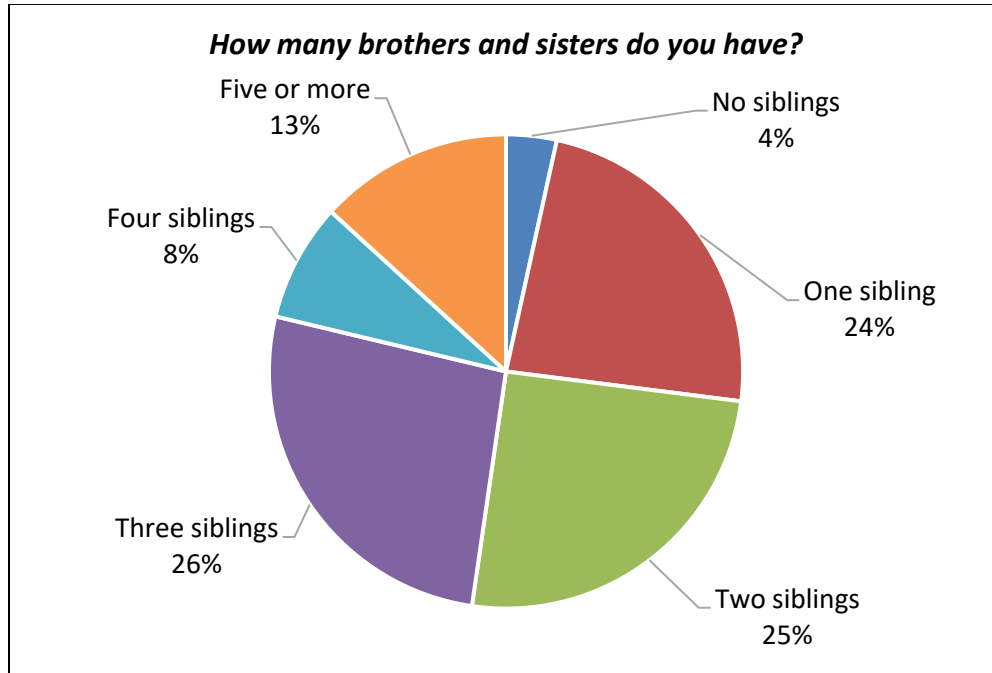
Religious Background of Respondents' Parents			
<i>Percentage responding</i>			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Both parents Catholic	74	74	74
Mother Catholic, father not	9	9	10
Father Catholic, mother not	8	7	8
Neither parent was Catholic	9	10	9

Respondents who had non-Catholic parents report that their parents were either Agnostic, Agnosticism / Buddhism, Baptist, Buddhism, Presbyterianism, Charismatic Evangelical, Cooperative Baptist, Coptic Orthodox, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Independent Christian, Lutheran, Methodist, Muslim, Non-denominational Christian, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Protestant, Seventh Day Adventist, Southern Baptist, United Church of Christ.

Regardless of the religious tradition of their parents, nearly six in ten (58%) respondents report that religion was “very important” to their mothers and four in ten (41%) report that religion was “very important” to their fathers.

Family Background

On average, members of the Entrance Class of 2023 have three siblings. The most common response to this question, among women and men, is one or two siblings (49%), four percent say he or she is an only child, one-quarter have one sibling (24%), another quarter has two siblings (25%), meanwhile less than half have three or more siblings (47%).



Nearly four in ten report being the eldest (37%). More than three in ten report being a middle child (33%). Less than three in ten report being the youngest (27%). Three percent report being an only child.

What is your birth order?
Percentage in each category

	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Eldest	37	40	34
Middle	33	30	36
Youngest	27	28	26
Only child	3	3	4

Entrants were asked to identify who raised them during the most formative part of their childhood. They could select one or more of the options presented in the table below. Almost all respondents were raised by their biological parents (96%) during that time, with one in ten raised by their grandparents (10%). Less than one percent were raised by stepparents.

Who raised you during the most formative part of your childhood?
 Respondents were invited to select all that apply

	Both	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Biological parents	96	96	96
Grandparents	10	10	11
Stepparents	1	0	1
Someone else	2	0	3
Other relative(s)	4	6	2
I prefer not to answer	1	1	1

They were also asked to identify the marital status of those that raised them during the most formative part of their childhood. Nearly nine in ten were raised by a married couple, living together (85%). Seven percent was raised by one parent who was either separated or divorced.

During the most formative part of your childhood, were you raised by:
 Percentage responding

	Both	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Married couple, living together	85	84	87
One parent, separated/divorced	7	10	6
Married couple, living separately	2	4	1
Unmarried couple, living separately	2	1	2
I prefer not to answer	1	0	1

Discussions about Vocations While Growing Up

More than half (52%) report that it was easy for them to start a conversation with their family about their vocation. Men are more likely than women to say that starting a discussion with their family was easy for them.

Discussions about Vocations While Growing Up			
Percentage responding “Yes” to each question*			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Overall, was starting a discussion with your family about your vocation easy for you?	52	63	42
Did your mother ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?	28	32	25
Did another family member ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?	25	32	19
Did your father ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?	23	28	1
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

- Nearly three in ten indicate that their mother ever spoke to them about a vocation to priesthood or religious life (28%)
- About a quarter indicate that another family member (25%) and father (23%) spoke to them about vocations to priesthood or religious life.

More than six in ten of the respondents (62%) report that outside of family members, while they were growing up, they ever got to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun. Just over a quarter have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun (27%).

Familiarity with Priests and/or Religious Brothers and Sisters/Nuns while Growing Up			
<i>Percentage responding "Yes" to each question</i>			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Outside of family members, while you were growing up did you ever get to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?	62	70	55
Do you have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?	27	29	25
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

Catholic Education Before Entering a Religious Institute

Half of respondents attended a parish-based religious education program (49%). Nearly half (46%) attended a Catholic elementary or middle school. Another four in ten attended a Catholic high school (38%) and Catholic college/university (37%) before entering their religious institute, nearly a quarter attending a Catholic ministry formation program before entering (23%).

<i>Did you attend any of the following before you entered? *</i>			
Percentage responding “Yes” to each question			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Parish-based religious education/CCD/PSR	49	48	51
Catholic elementary or middle school	46	40	52
Catholic high school	38	38	38
Catholic college/university	37	43	31
Catholic ministry formation program	23	18	28

Members of the Entrance Class of 2023 are almost three times more likely than other U.S. Catholics to have attended a Catholic elementary school. In a 2016 national poll conducted by CARA,¹ 16% of U.S. adult Catholics report having attended a Catholic elementary school, compared to 46% among entrants. Responding entrants of 2023 are almost five times more likely than other U.S. adult Catholics to have attended a Catholic high school (38% of respondents, compared to 8% of U.S. adult Catholics) and seven times more likely to have attended a Catholic college/university (37% of respondents, compared to just 5% of U.S. adult Catholics).

Whether or not they ever attended a Catholic elementary or high school, half of respondents (49%) participated in a religious education program at some time in their parish. Among respondents who said they participated in a religious education program in their parish, 59% did not report attending a Catholic elementary school and 57% did not attend a Catholic high school.

¹CARA Catholic Poll, 2016. Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

Education Level Before Entering a Religious Institute

The responding members of the Entrance Class of 2023 were highly educated before entering. More than six in ten (62%) report having earned a bachelor’s degree. Less than one in six received a master’s degree (17%) and 6% with a doctoral degree.

<i>What was your highest level of education you completed before you entered your religious institute?</i>			
Percentage responding			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
High school or less	5	1	8
Some college	9	7	11
Bachelor’s degree	62	67	58
Master’s degree	17	16	17
Doctoral degree	6	7	4
Other	1	0	2

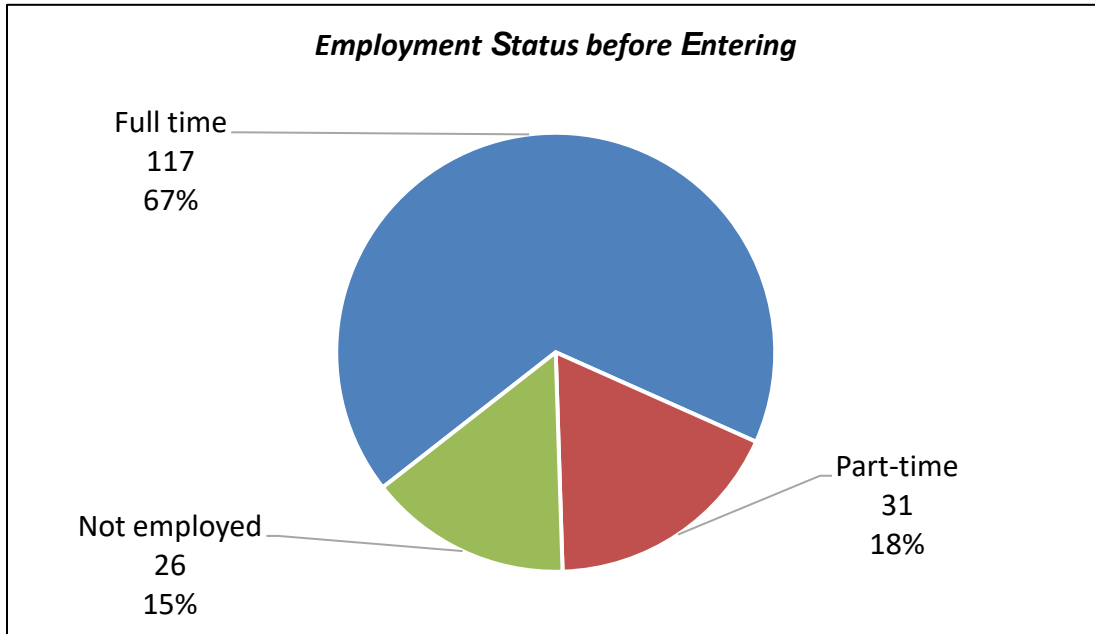
More than one in ten responding entrants (14%) report being home schooled at some time in their educational background.

<i>Were you ever home-schooled?</i>			
Percentage responding “Yes” or “No”			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Yes	14	10	17
No	86	90	83
 Average number of years home-schooled	 9	 10	 9

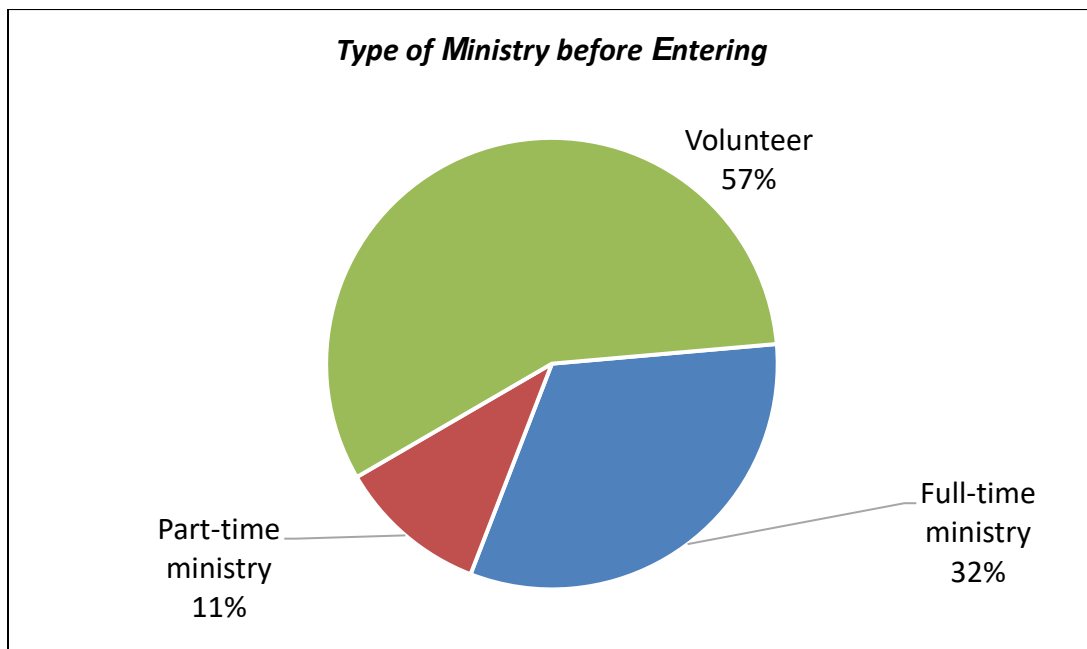
Among those who were home schooled, the average length of time they were home schooled was nine years.

Employment Before Entering

Respondents were asked if they were employed before entering religious life. One in nine respondents were not employed (15%). Two-thirds were employed full time (67%) and about one in five was employed part time (18%).



Before entering religious life, more than half were engaged in ministry (53%). Among them, more than three in ten were engaged in full-time ministry (32%), one in ten (11%) in part-time ministry, and nearly six in ten (57%) in voluntary ministry.



Participation in Religious Programs, Activities, or Ministries

Many respondents were active in parish life and/or other religious programs or activities before entering their religious institute. Almost all respondents (98%) participated in at least one of the programs or activities listed in the table below before entering.

<i>Aside from parish-based religious education, did you ever participate in any of the these before you entered?</i>			
Percentage checking each response*			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Retreats	67	54	79
Other volunteer work in a parish/other setting	57	46	67
Campus ministry during college	55	57	54
Parish young adult group	43	42	45
Right to Life March in Washington	39	28	48
Campus ministry during high school years	31	27	34
World Youth Day	10	9	11
National Catholic Youth Conference	10	5	14
Religious institute volunteer program (e.g. Mercy Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps)	9	10	9

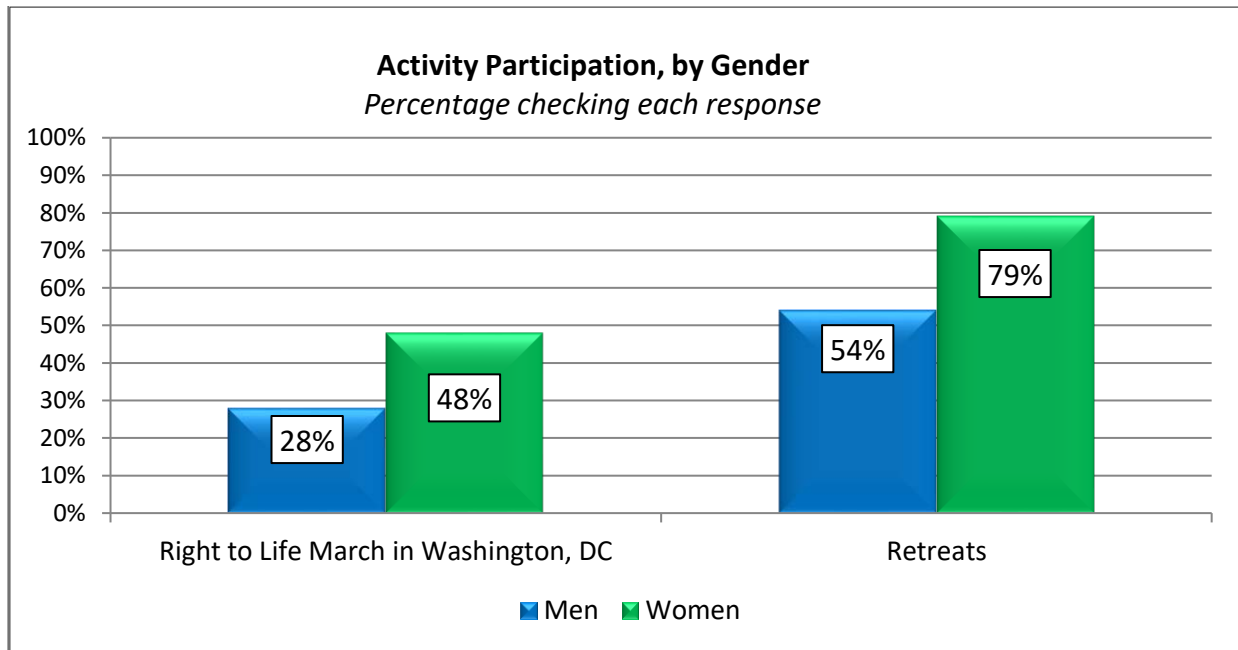
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.

- Nearly seven in ten respondents participated in retreats (67%).
- Nearly six in ten participated in other volunteer work in parish /other setting (57%) and campus ministry during college (55%).
- Four in ten respondents participated in parish young adult group (43%) and Right to Life March in Washington (39).
- Three in ten participated in campus ministry during high school years (31%).

- One in ten participated in World Youth Day (10%), National Catholic Youth Conference (10%), and religious institute volunteer program (e.g. Mercy Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps) (9%).

Differences by Gender

Responding women religious are more likely than men to have participated in the Right to Life March in Washington DC and Retreats.²



It is instructive to examine how many participated in parish programs as adults before they entered religious life. Nine in ten (90%) served in one or more specified parish ministries before entering their religious institute, either in a paid ministry position or as a volunteer.

Aside from parish-based religious education, did you ever participate in any of these before you entered?
Percentage checking each response

	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Liturgical ministry (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister)	59	65	54

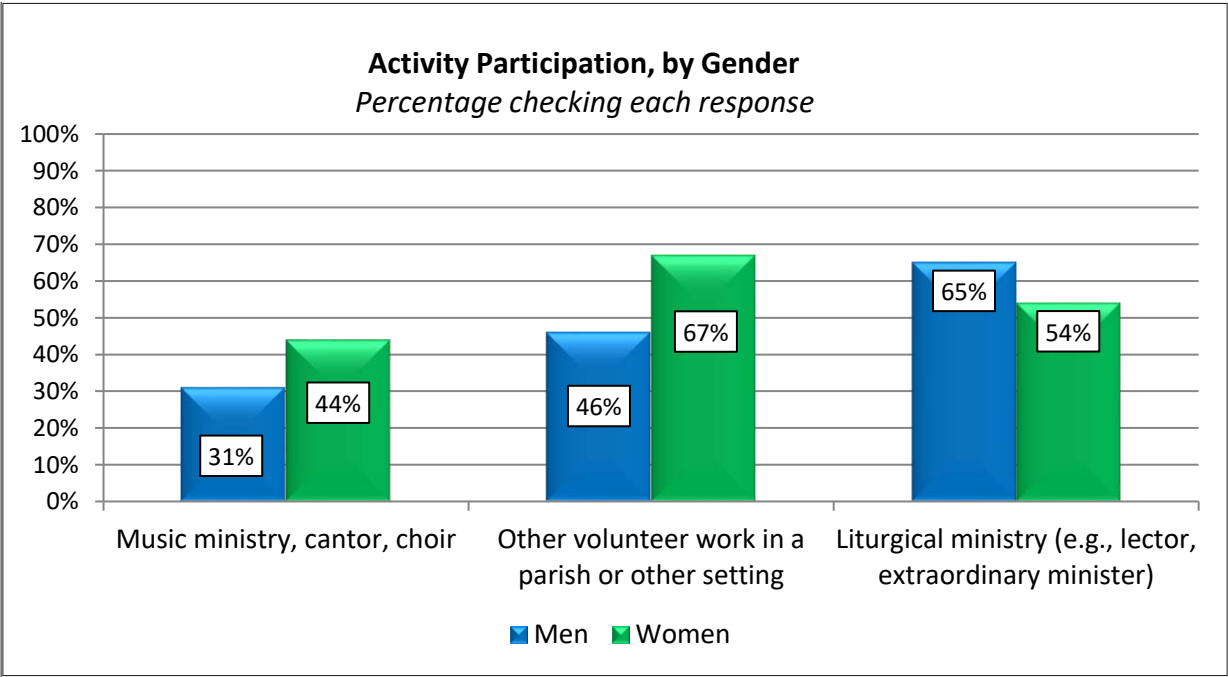
² As was noted in the Introduction, only differences of 10 percentage points or more will be treated as meaningful.

Other volunteer work in a parish/other setting	57	46	68
Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA team	42	39	45
Music ministry, cantor, choir	38	31	44
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.			

- Six in ten entrants report that they served in liturgical ministry roles, such as being a lector or extraordinary minister of Communion (59%) or in some other volunteer work in a parish/other setting (57%) before they entered their religious institute.
- Four in ten respondents report having participated in faith formation, catechetical ministry or RCIA (42%) and in music ministry, cantor, or choir (38%).

Differences by Gender

Responding women religious are more likely than men to have participated in music ministry and other voluntary work in the parish or other setting before entering their religious institute. In contrast, men are more likely than women to have participated in the liturgical ministry before entering their religious institute.



Part II Vocational Discernment to Religious Life

Attraction to Religious Life

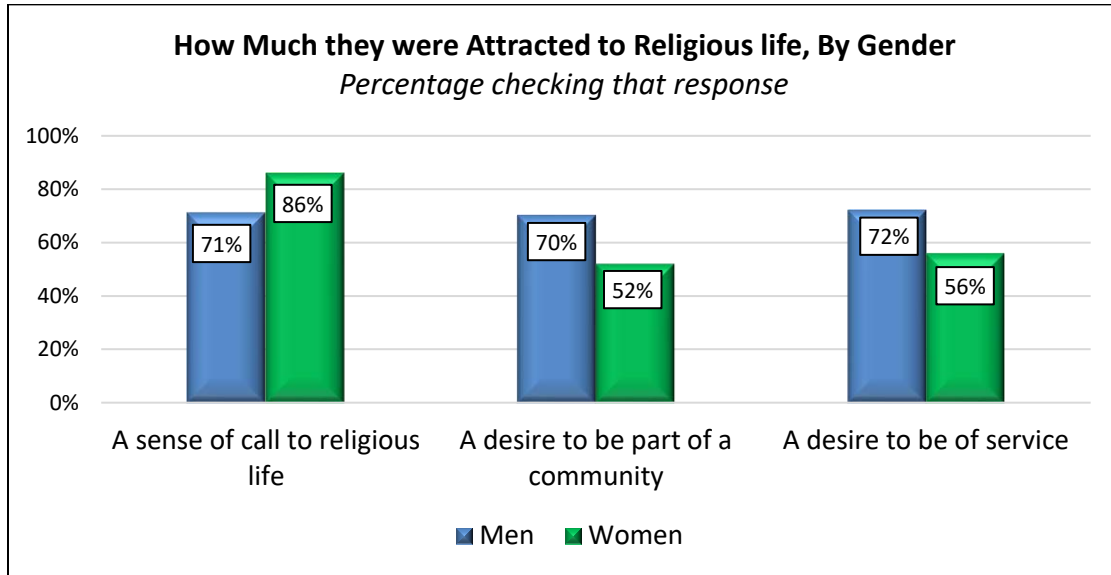
Entrants in 2023 were asked how much various elements attracted them to religious life. Nearly all respondents were “somewhat” or “very much” attracted to religious life by a desire for prayer and spiritual growth (98%) and a sense of call to religious life (97%). Four in five were “very much” attracted by these aspects.

How much did the following attract you to religious life?		
Percentage responding “Somewhat” or “Very Much”		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much” Attracted	“Very Much” Attracted Only
	%	%
A desire for prayer and spiritual growth	98	81
A sense of call to religious life	97	79
A desire to be part of a community	91	61
A desire to be more committed to the Church	85	51
A desire to be of service	84	64

- Nine in ten respondents were at least “somewhat” attracted to religious life by a desire to be part of a community (91%). More than half say each of these attracted them “very much.”
- More than eight in ten had a desire to be more committed to the Church (85%) and a desire to be of service (84%).

Comparisons by Gender

Men religious are more likely than women religious to be attracted to religious life a desire to be a part of a community and a desire to be a part of service. In contrast, women are more likely than men to be attracted to a sense of call to religious life.



Attraction to a Religious Institute

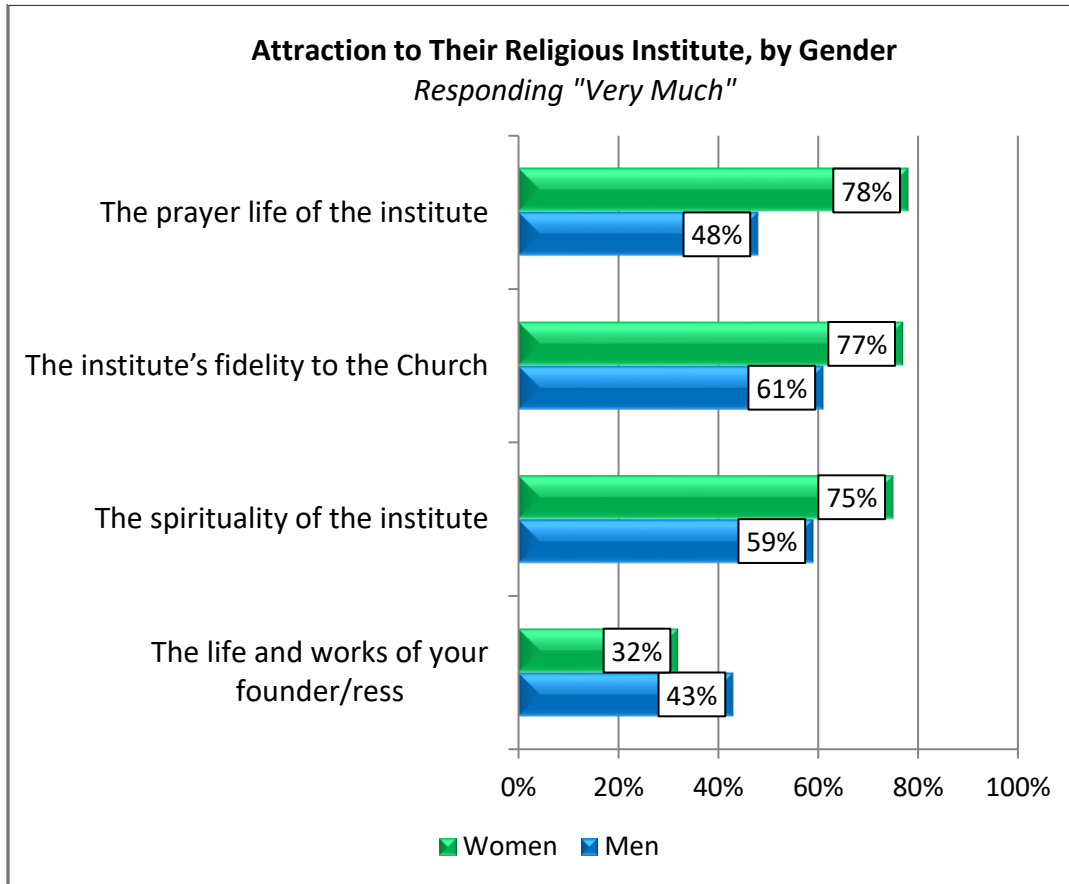
Entrants were asked how much each of ten aspects of religious life attracted them to their particular religious institute. Almost all of them report that they were “somewhat” attracted by the mission of the institute (95%), with two-third saying this aspect attracted them “very much.”

<i>How much did these attract you to your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much”	“Very Much” Only
	%	%
The mission of the institute	95	67
The community life of the institute	92	63
The prayer life of the institute	92	63
The example of members of the institute	91	67
The spirituality of the institute	91	67
The institute’s fidelity to the Church	89	69
Welcome and encouragement by members	88	64
The ministries of the institute	87	56
The life and works of your founder/ress	70	37

- Nine in ten respondents report they are at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the following, with from six to seven in ten saying these aspects attracted them “very much”:
 - The community life of the institute (92%)
 - The prayer life of the institute (92%)
 - The example of members of the institute (91%)
 - The spirituality of the institute (91%)
 - The institute’s fidelity to the Church (89%)
- Nearly nine in ten report they were at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the welcome and encouragement by the members (88%) and by the ministries of the institute (87%).
- Seven in ten report they are at least “somewhat” attracted to their religious institute by the life and works of the founder/ress (70%).

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to get attracted to their religious institute by the prayer life of the institute, the institute's fidelity to the Church, and the spirituality of the religious institute. In contrast, men are more likely than women to be attracted to their religious institute by the life and works of the founder/ress.



Helpfulness of Discernment Programs and Experiences

Entrants were asked how helpful selected vocation experiences were to them in discerning their call to their institute before they entered. This section only reports those who participated in these activities.

Among those who participated in these vocation experiences, almost all entrants report that they had contact with the vocation director (98%), the vocation or discernment retreat (98%), and “Come and See” experience (95%) were at least “somewhat” helpful in discerning to join the religious institute. About eight in ten say that contact with the vocation director was “very helpful” to them.

If you participated in any of the following with your religious institute before you entered, how helpful were these to you in discerning your call to your institute?

Percentage responding

	“Somewhat” or “Very” Helpful %	“Very” Helpful Only %
Contact with the vocation director	98	84
Vocation or discernment retreat	98	75
“Come and See” experience	95	74
Visit(s) to the Motherhouse	94	84
Contact with institute members	94	74
Live-in experience	93	85
Visit(s) to local community/ies	93	72
Spiritual direction	92	79
Ministry with institute members	90	61
Mission experience	84	55
Meeting with a discernment group	74	47
Social media (e.g., Facebook)	59	24
“Andrew Dinner” or “Nun Run”	44	44

- Nine in ten or more report they participated in vocation experiences were at least “somewhat” helpful in discernment to join the religious institute:
 - “Come and See” experience (95%)
 - Visit(s) to the Motherhouse (94%)
 - Contact with institute members (94%)
 - Live -in experience (93%)
 - Visit(s) to local community/ies (93%)

- Spiritual direction (92%)
- Ministry with the members (90%)

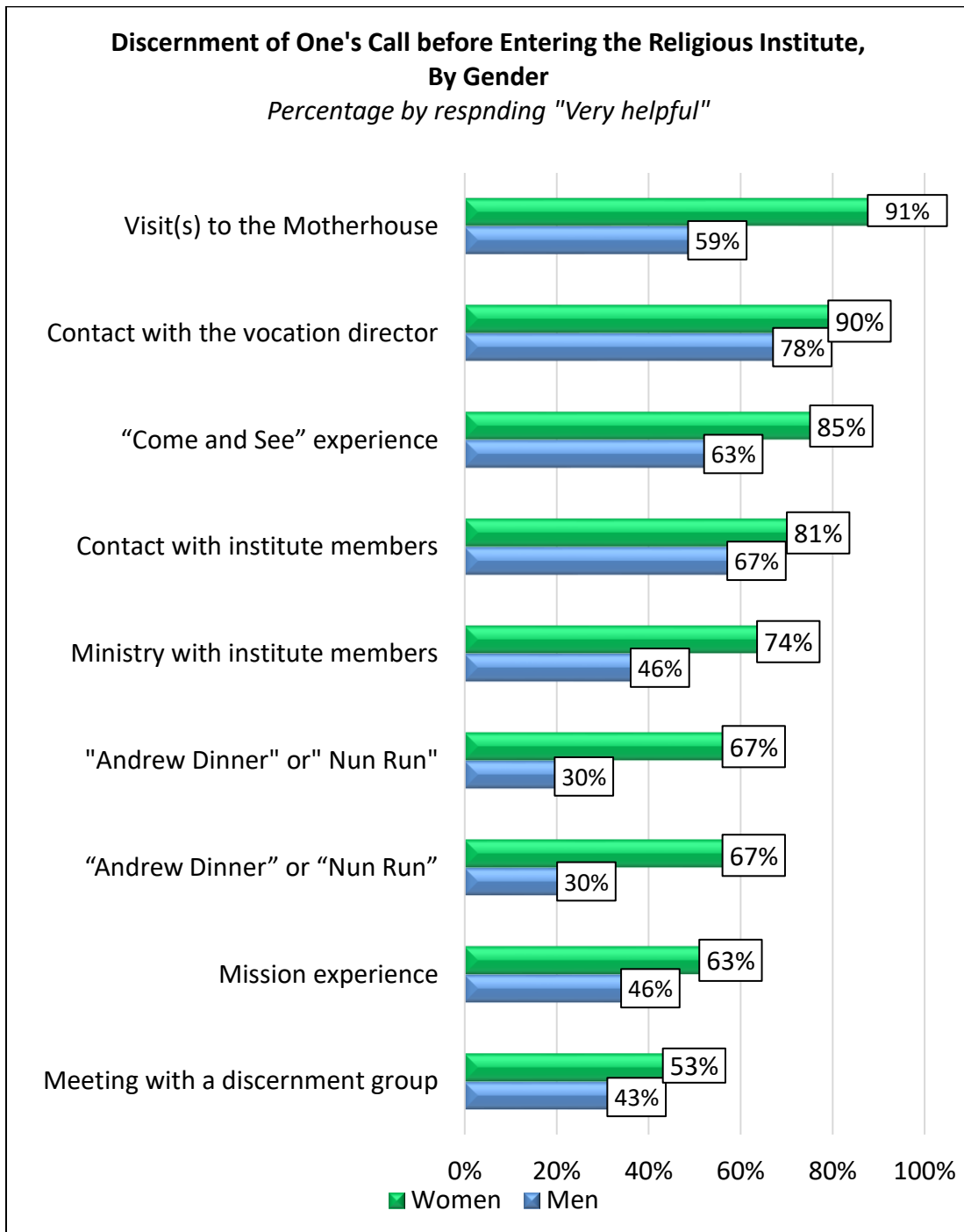
- Eight in ten indicate mission experience (84%) were at least “somewhat” helpful to them.

- About three-quarters report meeting with a discernment group (74%) were at least “somewhat” helpful to them.

- Six in ten indicate that social media (59%) were at least “somewhat” helpful to them. More than four in ten report that an “Andrew Dinner” or a “Nun Run” were “somewhat” helpful to them (44%).

Comparisons by Gender

Women entrants are more likely than men entrants to report that the nine experiences in the figure below were “very” helpful to them in discerning their call to their religious institute.



Consideration of a Vocation to Religious Life

On average, respondents were 20 years old when they first considered a vocation to religious life. Half were 20 or younger when they first considered a vocation.

Age When First Considered a Vocation to Religious Life			
	Overall	Men	Women
Mean age	20	21	20
Median age	20	20	19
Range of ages	3-66	6-49	3-66

Entrants to religious life were asked how much encouragement they received from various people when they first considered entering a religious institute. Nine in ten received encouragement from a spiritual director (94%), or Vocation Director/team (92%), members of the institute (89%) and friends outside the institute (89%) when they first considered entering a religious institute. Seven or more said these people encouraged them “very much.”

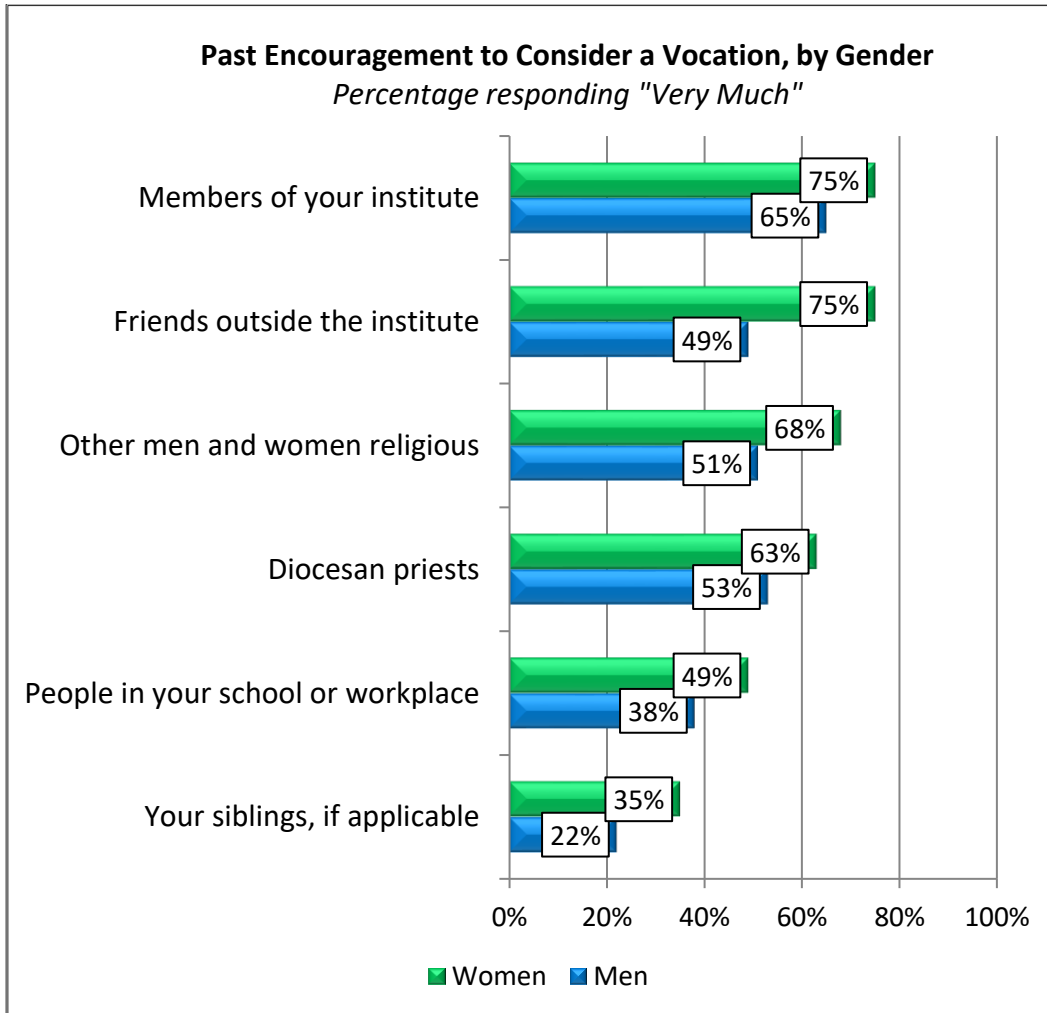
<i>How much encouragement did you receive from these when you first considered entering a religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much” Encouragement	“Very Much” Encouragement Only
	%	%
Spiritual director, if applicable	94	75
Vocation director/team	92	76
Members of your institute	89	70
Friends outside the institute	89	63
Other men and women religious	85	60
People in your parish	80	49
Diocesan priests	77	58
People in your school or workplace	74	44
Campus minister, if applicable	62	37
Your siblings, if applicable	62	29
Your parents, if applicable	59	30
Other family members	52	20

- Nine in ten received at least “somewhat” encouragement from other men and women religious (85%). Six in ten received encouragement from this group “very much.”

- Eight in ten people received encouragement from their parish (80%) and diocesan priests (77%). Half or more received encouragement from this group “very much.”
- Three quarters received encouragement from people of their school or workplace (74%).
- Six in ten received encouragement from campus minister (62%), from their siblings (62%) and their parents (59%).
- Just over half received encouragement from other family members (52%).

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to receive “very much” encouragement to consider a vocation from the people mentioned in the chart below.



Influences on Decisions to Enter Religious Institutes

Entrants were asked how much influence various aspects of their religious institute had on their decision to enter their institute. Almost all respondents report that the charism of the institute has at least “somewhat” influence on their decision to enter their religious institute (96%), with eight in ten reporting this aspect “very much” influenced them.

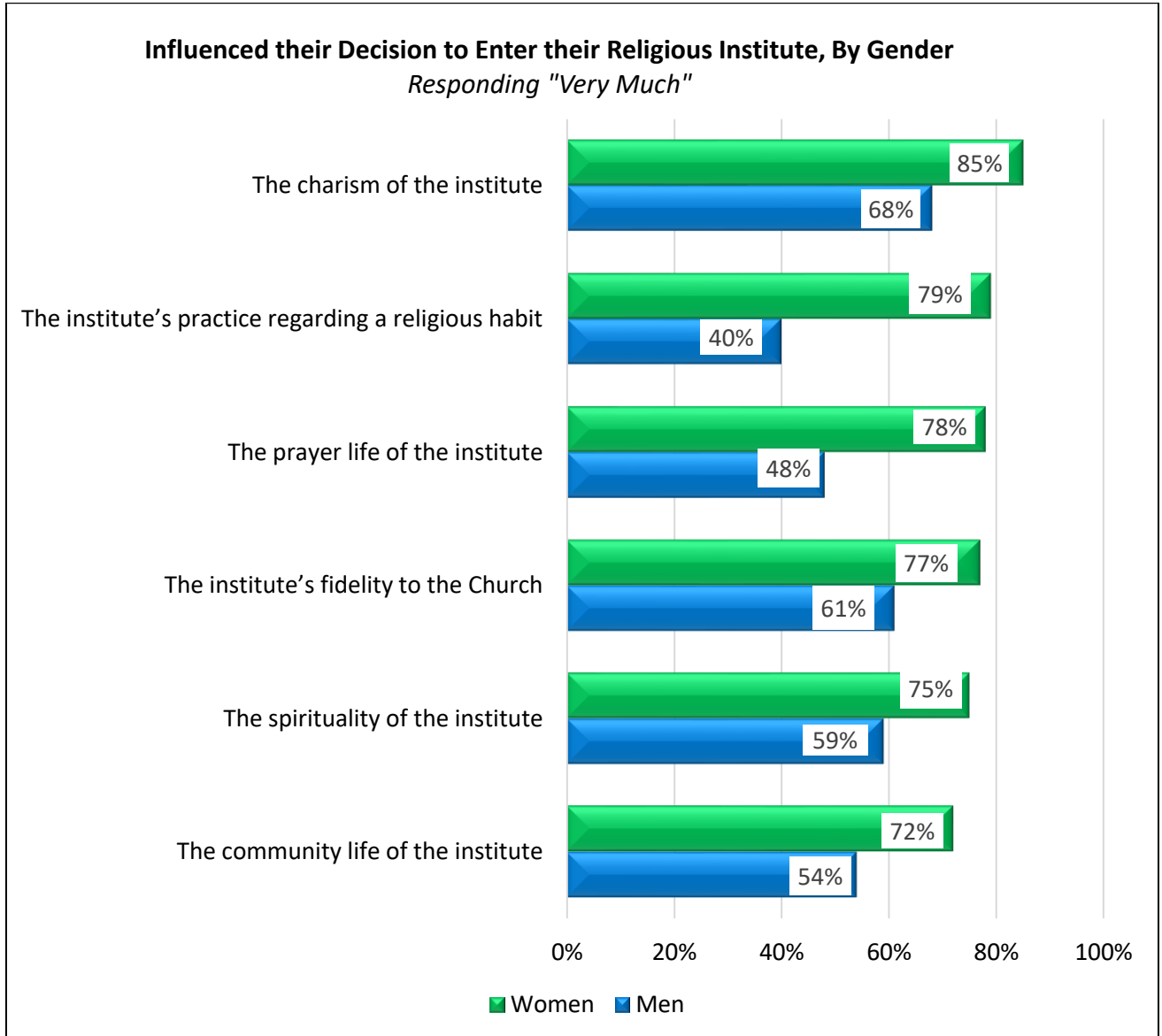
<i>How much did these influence your decision to enter your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very Much” Influenced	“Very Much” Influenced Only
	%	%
The charism of the institute	96	77
Community life in the institute	92	63
Prayer life or prayer styles in the institute	92	63
The lifestyle of members	92	63
The types of ministry of its members	87	56
Its practice regarding a religious habit	76	61
The focus on the possibilities for the future of the institute	67	27
The size of the institute	55	22
The ages of members	52	19
Its geographic location(s)	50	21
Its internationality, if applicable	45	27
The cultural diversity of the members	35	18
The racial/ethnic background of members	28	12

- Nine in ten report community life in the institute (92%), prayer life or prayer styles in the institute (92%), the lifestyle of members (92%), and the types of ministry of its members (87%) in the institute at least “somewhat” influenced by their decision to enter their religious institute.
- Three quarters of entrants report having been at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by its practice regarding a religious habit (76%).
- Two-third of responding entrants report having been at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the focus on the possibilities for the future of the institute (67%).

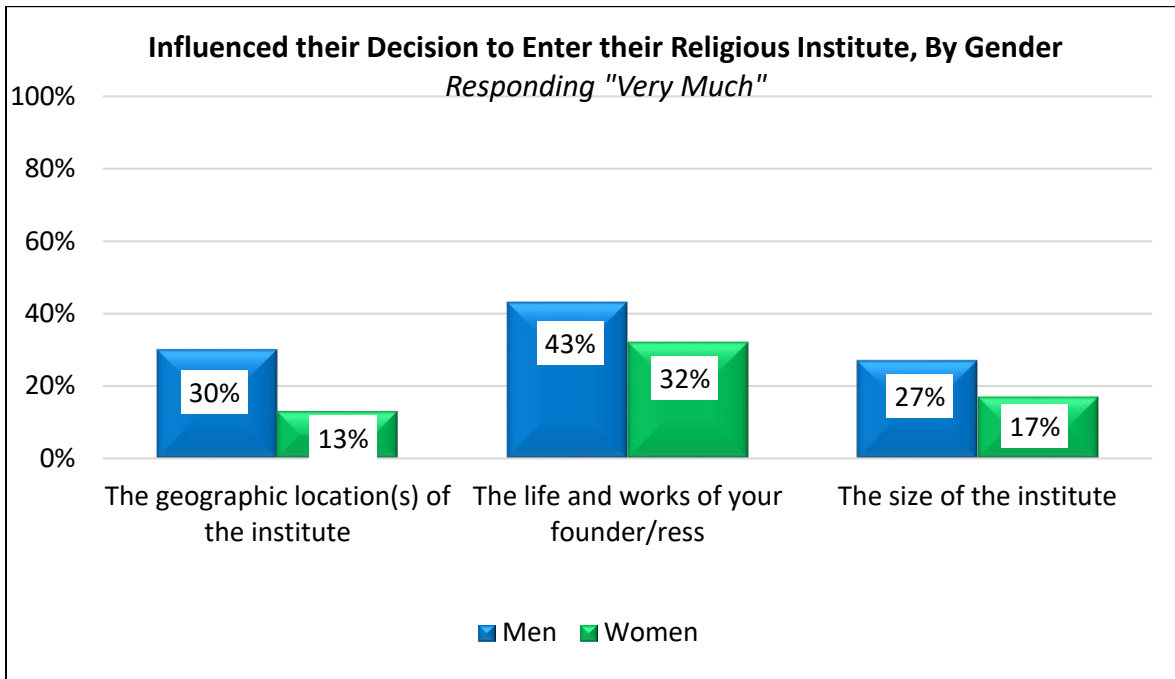
- Half indicate that the size of the institute (55%), the ages of members (52%), and its geographic location(s) (50%) at least “somewhat” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute.
- Two in five say its internationality (45%) at least “somewhat” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute.
- One-third say they were at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the cultural diversity of the members (35%).
- Three in ten indicates the racial/ethnic backgrounds of members (28%) at least “somewhat” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are most likely to report that the factors mentioned the chart below “very much” influenced their decision to enter their religious institute.



In contrast, men are most likely to be “very much” influenced in their decision to enter their religious institute by the aspects mentioned in the chart below.



Initial Acquaintance with the Religious Institute

Men and women entering religious life were asked to indicate how they first became acquainted with their religious institute.

How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute?

Percentage checking each response*

	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Through your own search	29	29	29
Through the recommendation of a friend or advisor	29	22	36
Through the reputation or history of the institute	26	34	18
In an institution where members served e.g. school	25	34	17
Through web or social media promotional materials	15	13	17
Through a relative or a friend in the institute	14	16	13
Through working with a member of the institute	12	11	13
Through an event sponsored by the institute	10	10	11
Through a media story about the institute or member	10	7	12
Through a vocation fair	6	7	4
Through a vocation match or placement service	5	4	5
Through print promotional materials	4	2	5
Other	16	9	23

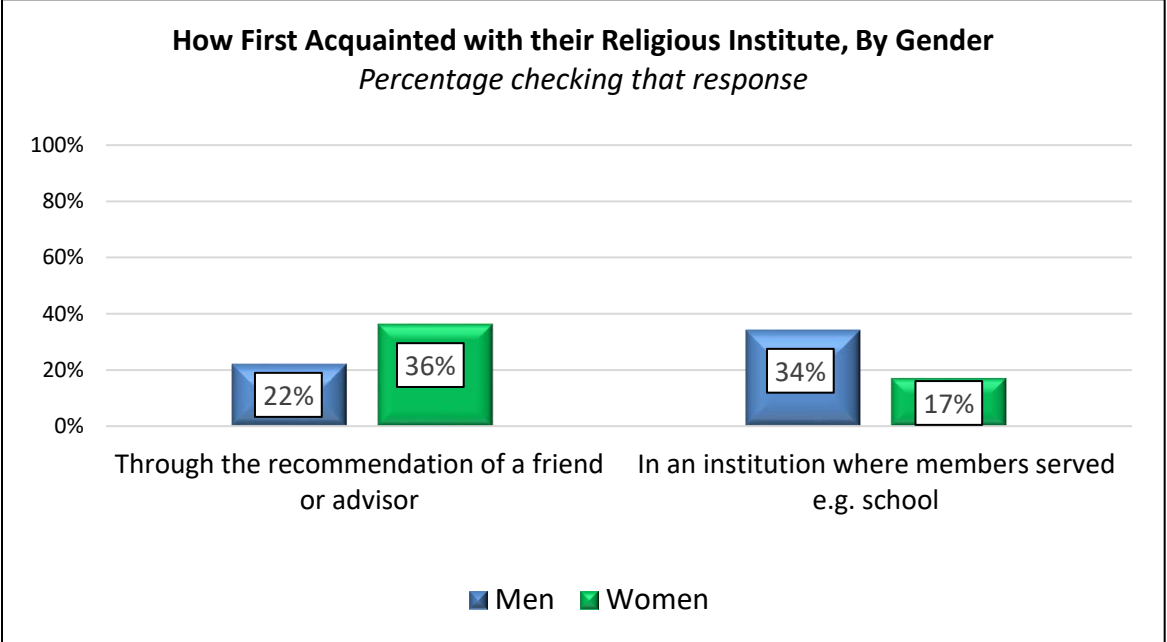
*Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one category.

- Three in ten report first being acquainted with their religious institute through their own search (29%) and through the recommendation of a friend or advisor (29%).
- A quarter report first being acquainted with their religious institute through the reputation or history of the institute (26%) and in an institution where members served e.g. school (25%). More men than women say they were acquainted through these ways.
- One in ten or more report first being acquainted with their religious institute through the following:
 - Through web or social media promotional materials (15%)
 - Through a relative or a friend in the institute (14%)
 - Through working with a member of the institute (12%)

- Through an event sponsored by the institute (10%)
- Through a media story about the institute or member (10%)
- Around one in twenty became acquainted with their religious institution through a vocation fair (6%), through a vocation match or placement service (5%), or through print promotional materials (4%).
- One in six (16%) first became acquainted with their religious institute through some “other” means (often during their college years). The “other” responses are listed below, lightly edited:
 - 24 Hour Adoration Chapel
 - A visit on the way to the March for Life.
 - A vocation Come and See at our university
 - Advent choir performance at the chapel
 - An invitation of a friend
 - Applied to a university they run
 - FOCUS Conference
 - FOCUS mission trip to New York
 - FOCUS' Seek Conference
 - From another religious community
 - Geographical contact with the saints of the order
 - Given Forum 2016
 - Grew up going to the same parish as the Sisters
 - Having member as a spiritual director
 - Media produced by the order
 - Mission trip
 - Mom knew a member
 - SEEK Conference
 - Sisters came to my university to give a retreat
 - Spiritual director
 - Through a young adult camp that the Sisters were at
 - Through a fundraising event for the institute
 - Through a vocations retreat
 - Through reading a book written by a member
 - Through the vocations director of another community
 - Through volunteer experience with the community
 - Through working for the community.
 - Website

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to have become acquainted with their religious institute as shown in the chart below.



What Most Attracted Entrants to Their Religious Institute

New entrants were also invited to respond in their own words to an open-ended question: *“What most attracted you to your religious institute?”*

Respondents shared many aspects of this attraction, including mission and ministries, the founder/ess, spirituality and charism of the institute, prayer life and communal prayer, community life, joy of the members, fidelity to the Church, its practice regarding religious habit, religious formation/lifestyle of the institute members and sense of social justice. A few of their comments related to each of these aspects are listed below. A full transcript of all open-ended responses is included in an appendix at the end of this report.

Founder/Foundress, Spirituality, and Charism of the Institute

The founder/foundress, the spirituality, and the charism of the institute were other common factors that attracted respondents to their religious institute. They report how much the spirituality of their institute’s founder or foundress inspired them and led to their decision to enter their religious institute. At least 131 respondents mentioned this aspect. Some of their responses include:

- *A deep yearning to be with the Lord in prayer and to serve him what most attracted me to my religious institute in particular was the way they lived out their Dominican charism and are faithful to the Traditions of the Church.*
- *Devotion to Mary and the Eucharist as well as an attention to liturgy for both office and mass. Orthodoxy to the faith as well as traditional learning among its members, as well as a clear zeal for pursuing truth and preaching the gospel for the salvation of souls. A sense of the cloister, silence and the need for monastic clients. (life following the rule of St. Augustine): all these elements are vital to me in a healthy and moral religious life and the pursuit of charity for us mendicants.*
- *I have always been inspired by the work of the Jesuits. I attended a Jesuit University and fell in love with their service and mission.*
- *I was most attracted by the fidelity and piety of some of the members I had grown up with. I saw in the Society of Jesus a pathway to God which my heart is attached on to. The history of the order was greatly attractive and seeing how the things done from St. Ignatius time are still done today.*
- *I was most attracted to the life of the founder, and I was attracted to the way he followed God. I was also attracted to the community life of the order.*

- *The charism of Mercy and the mission of being the convergence point between Christ's Mercy and the misery of mankind through works of healthcare and education.*
- *The fruit of the Saints that have emerged from the order. Not that many of them were mystics but in their simplicity and ordinary life God worked through them which is not only an example for the brothers in the order but the whole universal church!*
- *The sisters are all very different, but work together for a common purpose, serving the Lord and being in communion with him.*
- *The life and writings of the founder and the saints of my religious institute. Also, the charism of the order and the founding documents.*
- *What attracted me to my religious institute was 1. Belonging totally to Jesus and being his spouse 2. The Charism of the institute 3. Offering myself as a living sacrifice through Jesus. 4. Their prayer and authenticity.*
- *The charism and spirituality of the institute; the community life; the joy of its members I met while in discernment.*
- *The spirit of detachment along with prayer and humble service to the poor.*

Community Life

Another dominant element of attraction that the responding new entrants report is the community life of the institute. At least 50 respondents report that community life and community activities very much attracted them to their religious institute. In addition, some of their responses included:

- *I was most attracted by the charisms of the Order, but also the joy that was present within the community. I loved how the Sisters really seemed like a family, but everything was aimed towards the purpose of growing in relationship with the Lord and uniting ourselves more fully to Him. There was not just one thing that attracted me to the Dominican Sisters, but I feel like these are some of the more important aspects.*
- *Religious community is inclusive and supportive along with the charism.*
- *The beauty of the Charism to protect and enhance the sacredness of every human life. The deep commitment to prayer and being a Bride of Christ as the primary call. The gift of healthy and vibrant community life.*
- *The charism of community life, the egalitarian spirit among the members, the flexibility of possible ministries, the level of care and concern for the welfare of each member.*

- *The institute lives a life of rich prayer and community, which overflows into a vibrant joy and freedom that I witness in its members.*
- *The welcoming community I met when I visited communities, the stories of the founder, and the diversity in religious expressions among the members of the institute.*
- *The apostolate and the ways in which the many gifts of the members of the community are used together for service to the poor.*
- *What attracted me to my religious institute was the emphasis of community with a balance of work, prayer and recreation.*

Prayer Life and Spiritual Life

At least 34 respondents also recognize prayer as other attractive aspects that drew them to their religious institute. They were attracted by the communal prayers and various types of prayers, including daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic Adoration, daily rosary, and prayer of the Church. Some of their responses about prayer included:

- *I did not seek religious life out for myself nor did I ever think I would consider entering a convent, but God directed me here through His mysterious providence. I felt God's call after I attended a high school retreat at this religious institute, and then I attended the come and see a few months following it. In other words, God's call is what attracted me the most. It's where I experienced His love most powerfully and felt most at peace within my heart compared to any other place.*
- *I honestly was discerning with two other religious institute before considering the religious institute I belong to know. I went on "come and see" on a whom with my religious institute only because I could not make the spiritual. Exercise at this point of my discernment. Jesus spoke very clearly and I heard him calling me "to be his Bride" in this religious institute I belong to the Charism, life of prayer, spirituality- I had little knowledge of this prior to entering. But it was his call that I heard, and the made it happen.*
- *I want to give my life for God. To grow deeper in my prayers. Praying for the church, religious and others. To become one with our Lord.*
- *The charism of Evangelization and the gift of helping people to have a personal encounter with Jesus through prayer and praise. The love and joy the sisters share by bringing the faith to others and also among each other.*

- *Variety of ministries, chanted Liturgy of the Hours, specializing in sharing/defending the faith well.*
- *I was most attracted to the Charism the reverence I witnessed and experienced on visits (reverence for the eucharist, for one another, for every person they encounter) and to the community life (praying together sharing meals together, always together in mission recreating together).*

Sense of Mission and Ministries of the Institutes

One of the common aspects that most attracted respondents to their religious institute is the sense of mission and ministries of the institute. At least 34 respondents indicated this aspect. Some other responses include:

- *A very clear sense of mission-working with the poor.*
- *I want to live a life totally committed to God---to make of my life a wholly burnt offering to Him. And out of that commitment to God, to serve His people. I was attracted to the Dominicans because of their orthodoxy to Church teachings, communal prayer, fraternal life, emphasis on study (the spirituality of study), and wearing of the habit.*
- *I was attracted to the patrimony of the Order and the relevance of its charism and mission to today's needs.*
- *Mission to preach and teach, Young vocations, Wearing of habits, Prayerful mass and liturgy.*
- *The charism of the older of Most Holy Trinity and of the captives attracted me the most to the older. Their whole spirituality is bared on Most Holy Trinity and working among the persecuted Christians.*
- *The diversity of work that they accomplish. I was ordained a diocesan priest seven years ago: I loved my work in the parish, but my religious institute (which I just recently joined) works in a variety of apostolates, especially education, work with youth, and spiritual direction. These attract me greatly, and I therefore felt called to discern with this institute.*
- *The witness of authentic love the sisters have for one another and the Word. Their missionary zeal which takes them to the ends of the earth.*
- *What attracted me most to my religious institute was the mix of the active and the contemplative life. I loved the idea of living a life of prayer which would flow directly into the hearts of the people we serve and, in this way, show the praying Christ to the world.*

- *The apostolate and the ways in which the many gifts of the members of the community are used together for service to the poor.*

Joy of the Institute's Members

In addition, at least 24 respondents were attracted to their religious institute by the joy of the members and their encounter with them. Some of their responses include:

- *Religious community is inclusive and supportive along with the charism.*
- *The beauty of the Charism to protect and enhance the sacredness of every human life. The deep commitment to prayer and being a Bride of Christ as the primary call. The gift of healthy and vibrant community life.*
- *The members' warm welcome, their joy, and their years of faithful example.*
- *I felt a strong sense of belonging or feeling "at home." I felt natural being with the Sisters and got along with them easily. They are very joyful and filled with laughter. They are supportive of one another. I loved their history with St. Alphonsus, as I have loved St. Alphonsus for much of my life. It just felt right.*
- *I was most attracted by the charisms of the Order, but also the joy that was present within the community. I loved how the Sisters really seemed like a family, but everything was aimed towards the purpose of growing in relationship with the Lord and uniting ourselves more fully to Him. There was not just one thing that attracted me to the Dominican Sisters, but I feel like these are some of the more important aspects.*
- *The charism of community life, the egalitarian spirit among the members, the flexibility of possible ministries, the level of care and concern for the welfare of each member.*
- *The charism of the community and the way it has been lived out in their lives and ministries.*
- *The institute lives a life of rich prayer and community, which over flowers into a vibrant joy and freedom that I witness in its members.*
- *The welcoming community I met when I visited communities, the stories of the founder, and the diversity in religious expressions among the members of the institute.*
- *What attracted me to my religious institute was the emphasis of community with a balance of work, prayer, and recreation.*

Fidelity to the Church

Fidelity to the Church is another important aspect that at least 20 respondents report attracted them to their religious institute. Some of their responses include:

- *I was attracted by the personal witness of several religious, and helped to discern and get to know the institute especially by spiritual direction. The opportunities for growth and service through a whole life devoted to prayer, study, community living, and ministry continues to draw me.*
- *Originally the apostolic work attracted me most, specifically in health care. After my visits to the mother house, the example of the sisters and the Charism of the institute attached me. I am also very attracted by the institute's fidelity to the church and in authentically living out religious life.*
- *The charism and fidelity to the Church, but what set them apart was the quality of community life that I observed among the Sisters.*
- *The diocesan charism and the church family becoming my own family in a particular diocese.*
- *Their faithfulness to Christ's teachings and the tradition of the Church, and their common life and the love that have for each other and the quality of men they are.*
- *The commitment to the truth of the Church's teachings and the dedication to preaching it to all people's fearlessly.*
- *What most attracted me to this community was the combination of fidelity to the church. The holiness and joyful witness of its members. The centrality of the Eucharist in their prayer life, and their teaching Charism, to which I felt called.*

Formation, Living their vows, Adaptation to religious life and others

Several respondents reported that what attracted them to religious institute are formation, living their vows and adaption to religious life. At least 23% of the respondents indicated the following responses:

- *Formation, love of truth, missions in the most difficult places.*
- *Sense of joy and love. Desire to be nurtured in faith and service. Sense of calling.*
- *That they wear a habit, had a good formation programme, their apostolates, their prayer life and their fidelity to the Church.*

- *The deep sense of mission and Spirituality of finding God in all things. The formation for mission and the broadness of activity in the world.*
- *Its simplicity: it seemed to be faithful to the roots of monastic life and to be all about loving God through the practice of the evangelical counsels. It seemed to be neither trying to be modern or attractive to current tastes, nor to be "traditional" for the sake of going against the grain. It seemed to be ever ancient, ever new because of its deep roots and total focus on God. This is what I perceived in the sisters I met and during my visits.*
- *Our Charism, prayer life, community life, our vows and our missionary spirit.*
- *What most attracted me to the Marist Brothers was their strong sense of community, dedication to education, and commitment to serving others with love and compassion. The values of simplicity, humility, and solidarity that the Marist Brothers embody resonated deeply with me, inspiring me to join their institute as a novice and continue to grow in faith, service, and brotherhood.*

Others

Other respondents report other aspects that are not listed in the categories above.

- *Their faithful living of their religious vocation, joy, ministry in parishes, and the prospect of returning to serve in "home" diocese.*
- *The Charism of the institute and the fidelity to the essential and traditional elements of religious life of living and praying in common and wearing a habit.*
- *I am disabled and knew my choices would be fewer than my non-disabled counterparts, so I was transparent about my accessibility needs with every community I visited. I loved that this order had always allowed for disabled women to join. I also felt very welcomed, and my vocations director answered all of my questions on accessibility right away. I felt very at home here.*
- *Progressive attitude toward ministry and the other and a deep understanding of the culture of the world.*
- *The Blend of Contemplative - Active life that is more contemplative; The charism and Spirituality; the communal life receives when visiting them; confirmation from God in prayer; wearing a full religious habit; opportunities to use my gifts & talents while still being helped to grow.*

- *The Abbot's writing and teaching. The silence and beauty of the Hilltop.*
- *The multiculturalism and its openness to the universal church.*
- *The opportunity to serve with my gifts and talents in a field in need of religious, while also being part of a vibrant community life that felt like the family life I'd experienced growing up.*

Part III Experience of Religious Life and Religious Institute

Prayer Practices

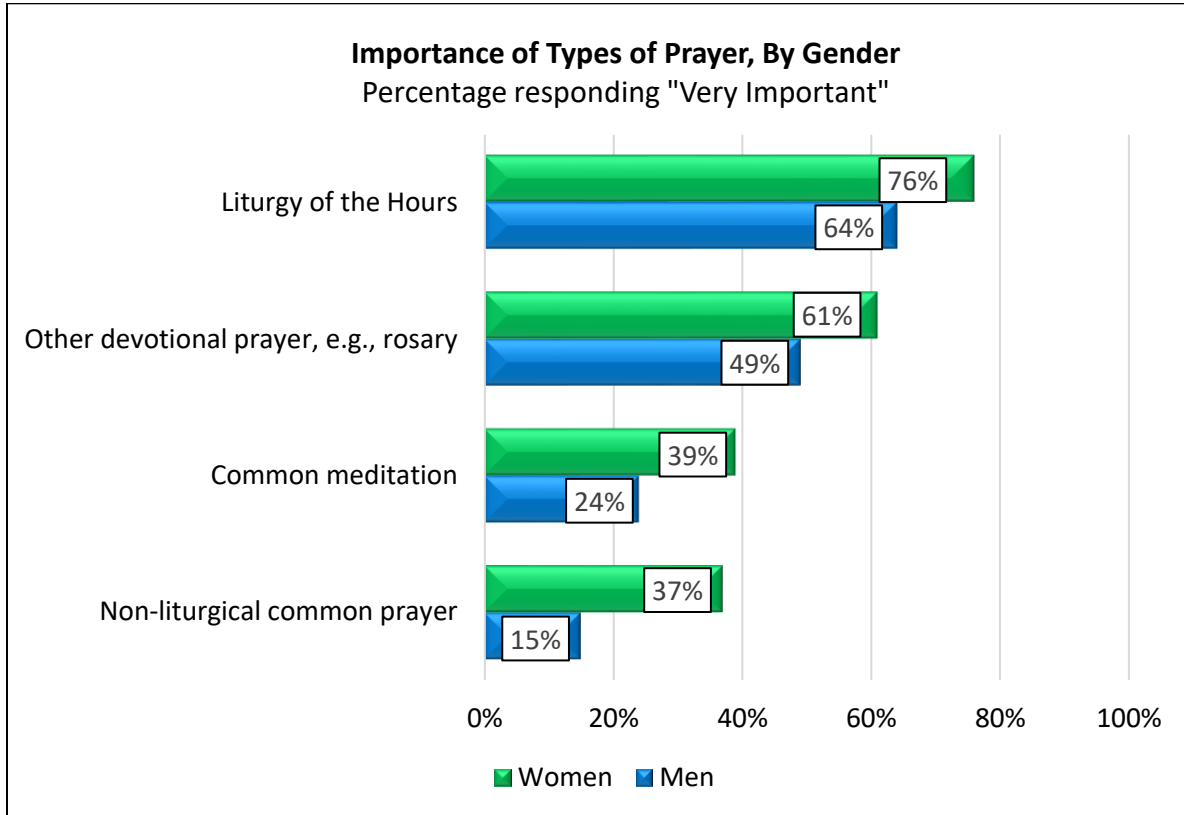
Respondents were asked to evaluate how important each of eight different types of prayer are to them. Almost all respondents say private personal prayer (98%) and daily Eucharist (97%) are at least “somewhat” important to them. Nine in ten report that these types of prayers are “very” important to them.

<i>How important to you are these types of prayer?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very” Important	“Very” Important Only
	%	%
Private personal prayer	98	87
Daily Eucharist	97	91
Eucharistic Adoration	91	82
Liturgy of the Hours	89	71
Other devotional prayer, e.g., rosary	86	56
Faith sharing	70	37
Non-liturgical common prayer	63	27
Common meditation	60	32

- Nine in ten respondents report that Eucharistic Adoration (91%), the Liturgy of the Hours (89%) and other devotional prayer, e.g., rosary (86%) are at least “somewhat” important to them. Six in ten or more report that these kinds of prayers are “very” important to them.
- Seven in ten report that faith sharing (70%) is at least “somewhat” important to them.
- Six in ten say non-liturgical common prayer (63%) and common meditation (60%) are at least “somewhat” important to them.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to say that the types of prayer mentioned in the chart below are “very” important to them.



Importance of Aspects of Community Life

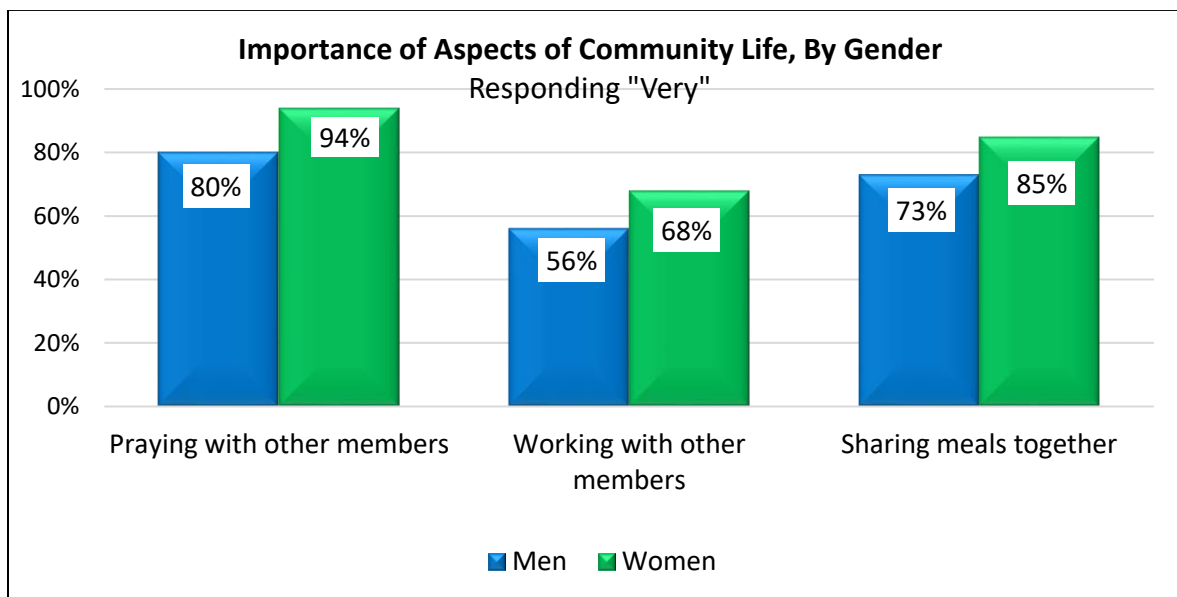
Entrants to religious life were asked to indicate the importance to them of various aspects of community life. Almost all report that praying with other members (98%), living with other members (97%), and sharing meals together (96%) are at least “somewhat” important to them, with eight or more in ten saying these aspects are very important to them.

How important to you are these aspects of community life?		
Percentage responding		
	“Somewhat” or “Very”	“Very” Only
	%	%
Praying with other members	98	87
Living with other members	97	82
Sharing meals together	96	79
Socializing/sharing leisure time together	90	74
Working with other members	90	62

Nine in ten indicate that socializing/sharing leisure time together (90%) and working with other members (90%) are at least “somewhat” important to them.

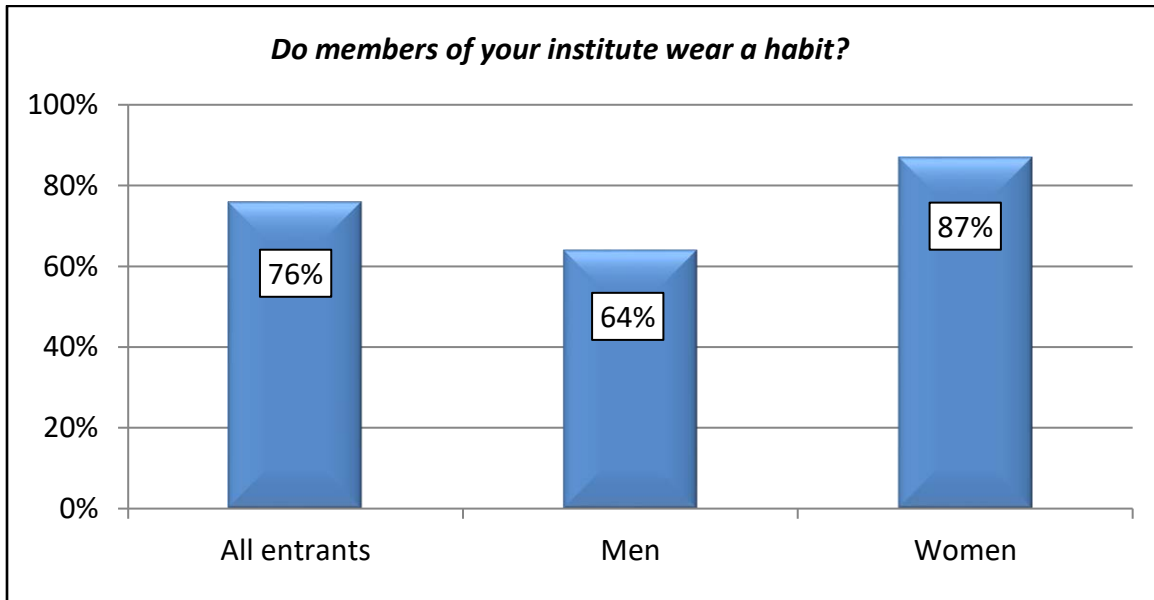
Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to say that all these aspects mentioned in the chart below are “very” important to them.

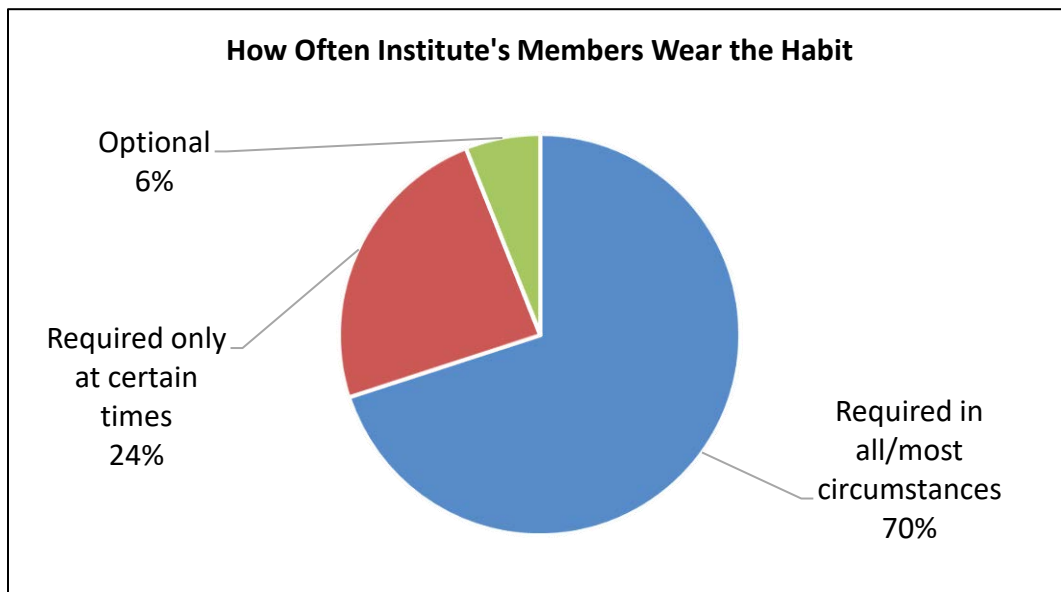


Wearing Religious Habit

New entrants were asked if the members of their institute wear a habit. About three-quarters (76%) indicate that members of their institute wear a habit. Women are more likely than men to say that members of their institute wear a habit.



Among those who indicate that members wear a habit, seven in ten indicate that the habit is required in all or most circumstances (70%). A quarter report that the habit is required only at certain times (24%), and just 6% report that wearing habit is optional in their institute.



Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to say that wearing the habit is required in all or most all circumstances. Men, on the other hand, are more likely than women to say wearing the habit is required only at certain times.

<i>If yes, is wearing the habit:</i>			
Percentage responding			
	Overall	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Required in all or most circumstances	70	31	95
Required only at certain times	24	58	3
Optional	6	12	3

Evaluation of Aspects of the Religious Institute

Entrants were asked to evaluate their experiences while in their institute. With one exception, more than eight in ten (82% to 97%) rate their religious institute as “good” or “excellent” in each of the aspects shown in the table below.

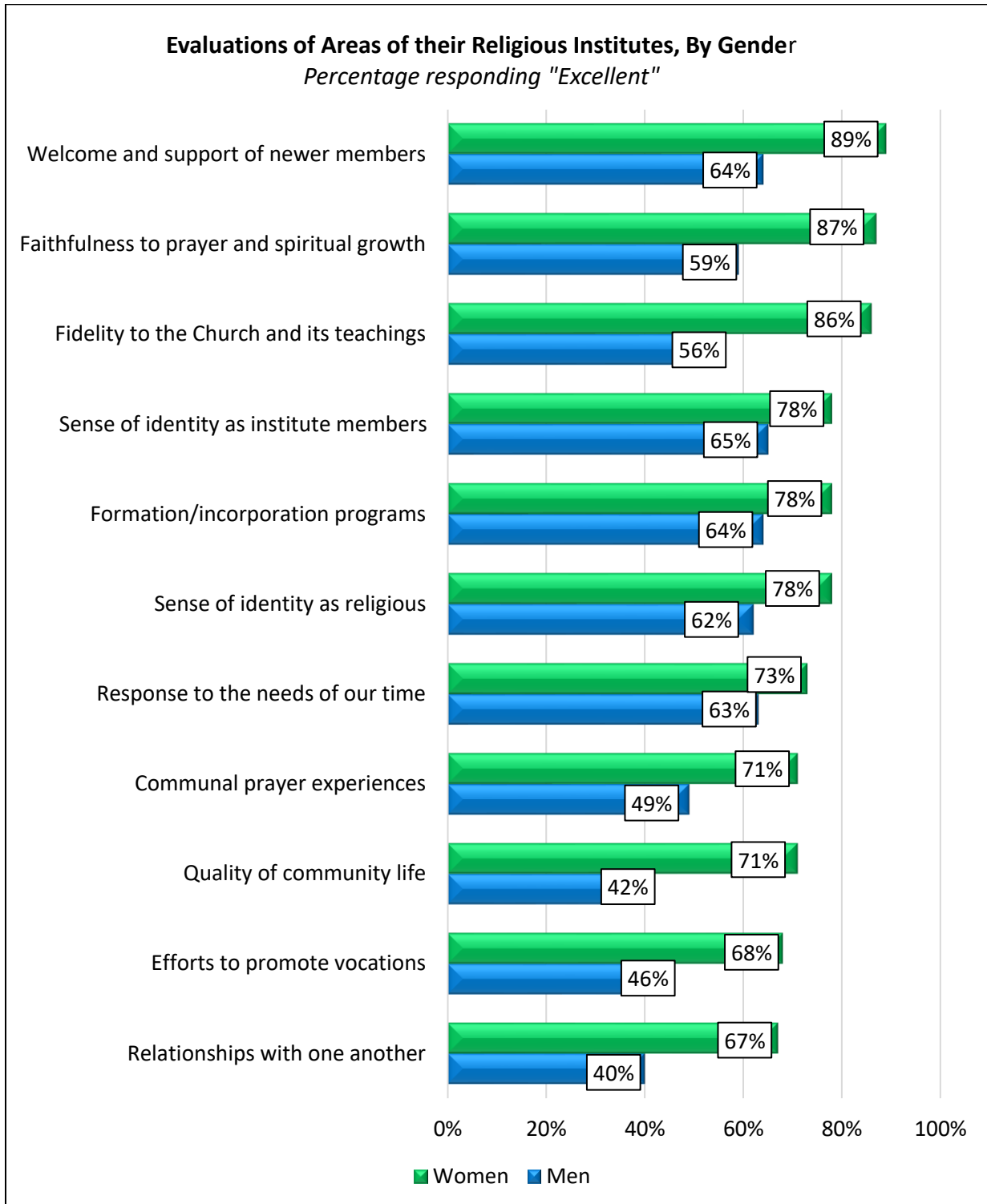
<i>How would you rate these in your religious institute?</i>		
Percentage responding		
	“Good” or “Excellent”	“Excellent” Only
	%	%
Opportunities for spiritual growth	97	81
Opportunities for personal growth	97	79
Welcome and support of newer members	97	77
Commitment to ministry	96	72
Opportunities for ongoing formation	95	66
Quality of community life	95	57
Educational opportunities	94	75
Faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth	94	74
Relationships with one another	94	54
Communal prayer experiences	93	60
Response to the needs of our time	93	25
Preparation for ministry	92	61
Sense of identity as institute members	91	72
Focus on mission	91	66
Sense of identity as religious	90	70
Efforts to promote vocations	89	57
Efforts to promote social justice	87	52
Formation/incorporation programs	84	71
Fidelity to the Church and its teachings	82	71
Diversity of cultures within the institute	75	39

- Examining only those rating an aspect as “excellent” shows the areas where entrants are particularly satisfied. About eight in ten the followings are “excellent”:
 - Opportunities for spiritual growth (81%)
 - Opportunities for personal growth (79%)
 - Welcome and support of newer members (77%)

- About three -quarters rate their religious institute as excellent regarding the educational opportunities (75%) and faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth (74%).
- About seven in ten rate these areas of their religious institutes as “excellent”:
 - Commitment to ministry (72%)
 - Sense of identity as institute members (72%)
 - Formation/incorporation programs (71%)
 - Fidelity to the Church and its teachings (71%)
 - Sense of identity as religious (70%)
- Two-thirds rate opportunities for ongoing formation (66%) and focus on mission (66%) in the religious institutes as *excellent*.
- About six in ten rate preparation for ministry (61%) and communal prayer experiences (60%) in their religious institutes as *excellent*.
- More than half rate quality of community life (57%), efforts to promote vocations (57%), relationships with one another (54%) and efforts to promote social justice (52%) in their religious institutes as *excellent*.
- Finally, four tenths rate diversity of cultures within the institute (39%) is the area of their religious institutes as *excellent*.

Comparisons by Gender

Women are more likely than men to rate their religious institute as “excellent” on almost all aspects mentioned in the chart below.



What Entrants Find Most Challenging about Religious Life

A second open-ended question invited new entrants to respond in their own words to “What do you find most challenging about religious life?” Respondents shared a variety of challenges that face them in religious life, including community life, maturing into religious life, adaptation to religious life, decreasing access to family and friends, and other challenges. A few of their comments relative to each of these aspects are listed below. A full transcript of all open-ended responses is included in an appendix at the end of this report.

Community Life

At least 73 respondents most commonly report that they find community life the most challenging aspect of their religious life experience. They have learned that living in community may involve loss of privacy, as well as struggles in living with the members who have different cultural backgrounds, opinions, ages, temperaments, personalities, and preferences. Some of their responses include:

- *Dealing with a great diversity of opinions and practices inside community life. I struggle with inconsistent styles of worship, even though it is all rooted in a love for Christ.*
- *The most challenging thing has been finding a balance between personal and communal expectations.*
- *I have found that it has been challenging to connect with certain brothers whose personalities are very different from mine.*
- *Not everyone in religious life is immediately holy. Some guys have a hard time getting along with each other and tend to bicker a lot. It can be difficult to surrender my will to God in that.*
- *Living with many different personalities and temperaments.*
- *I find the uncertainty about the future with the declining membership very challenging.*
- *Living in community can be challenging and there are differences in opinion about the direction the Church should be moving and the direction the community will take in the future.*
- *Learning how best to live in community, especially with those who have very different habits in life.*
- *Being really available and present in community.*

Living their Vows

Approximately 58 respondents most commonly report that they find religious vows the most challenging aspect of their religious life experience. They have learned that living the three vows requires relinquishing the previous life they were used to lead. Some of their responses include:

- *My greatest difficulty is letting go of my own independence which I had cultivated before entering.*
- *For me it is giving up old things like playing video games, listening to music, watching movies whenever I want. The hardest part is surrendered our will to the will of another.*
- *Balancing prayer like and other obligations. Living in the moment while information. Leaning to be intimate in different ways.*
- *The most challenging aspect of religious life is the daily surrender to God's. Letting go it your own will. And trey doing both of those thing multiple times a day.*
- *Accepting my own spiritual poverty and allowing myself to be loved by Christ through my sisters.*
- *Learning to surrender my own will and preferences in order to live out obedience.*
- *Surrendering all that I have and am, including my will. Learning obedience and growing to be obedient in loving my sisters and superiors.*
- *Growing in obedience and learning to surrender my will to the Father's will, doing what's asked of me even if I don't want to do it. Also, learning to live with others from various backgrounds.*

Maturing in Religious Life

At least 58 respondents also report the challenge of recognizing and addressing limitations in themselves and others, while desiring to grow in religious life. They regularly mentioned their difficulty in learning how to be open with oneself, superiors, managing all expectations and time management. Some of their responses include:

- *Adjusting to communal life and learning how to be open with myself/superiors/brothers. Additionally, being away from home permanently.*

- *It is difficult managing all the expectations and time management, while still finding time to unwind to serve better. As an introvert, it can be hard to find time and space to recharge properly or to manage stress. The relationship required with my formation director can be a little overwhelming at times, as there isn't a comparable type of relationship outside of religious life.*
- *I am already ordained, so the most challenging aspect for me is learning how the religious identity differs from the diocesan identity.*
- *Perseverance in desolation, purification of my soul, healing process.*
- *Allowing the Lord to love me, form me, heal me and draw me deeper into relationship with him every single day.*
- *I find the balancing of everything most challenging. Between community life, personal prayer, and study, it can take a lot of management. At the same time, all of these aspects have helped me to grow in knowledge of myself and of the Lord, and these things have helped me to understand and appreciate the gifts that the Lord has blessed me with.*
- *Some part of the formation could be challenging.*
- *God has granted with many graces in my formation and I have been grateful to His humility. What I found hard at first was feeling small and being unable to do things perfectly. I often become discouraged when I'm corrected or things don't go right, but in the end, God fortifies me and leads on because I have come and live to love Jesus.*

Adaptation to Religious Life

About 25 respondents found challenges in adapting to the new life style in their religious communities. This adjustment includes daily schedule, new life pace, prayer life, community life and huge adjustment to religious life among other things. Some of their responses include:

- *Fighting the temptation to take on too many responsibilities, both in ministry and within the formation house / institute.*
- *Adjusting to minimal contact with my family, learning to become part of the community, and to "feel at home."*
- *Continuing to discern when God is calling me to walk with my sisters in formation and when He is just walking with me alone for some parts. Handling my family's reaction is also incredibly difficult.*

- *Religious life is so counter cultural, so it is a huge adjustment. It is also challenging to encounter all off our wounds word weaknesses, but it is a great gift to do it is a place when one is utterly supported to heal and grow.*
- *The transition from secular studies/work and being in a relationship to a life ordered by the vows, and an uncertain future, continues to involve some letting go and discovering a new identity and trust in God.*
- *Leaving or setting aside the "goods" of what I had before entering (family involvement, relationships, hobbies, friendships in ministry, etc.)*
- *Adjusting to a life of obedience rather than being able to have control over my day.*

Decreasing Communication with Family and Friends

Another challenge that respondents shared was their decreased communication with their family members and friends. The schedule and lifestyle in religious life lead religious to reduce their connections with families and friends. They live far away from their family and friends and that sometimes leads them to homesickness. Some of them also felt that their family and friends did not understand religious life and their decision to enter the religious life. They also missed some other relationships and felt that religious life somehow reduces their opportunity for communication. At least 26 respondents indicate some of their responses below:

- *Being away from my family and friends who I left back at home.*
- *Finding the right balance of how to relate and communicate to my family and friends outside of religious life.*
- *Being subject to a superior in the vow of obedience. The vow of celibacy and never getting married and having a family. Being away from family and friends, missing them and also worrying that they will be alright without me, especially my mother; I worry a lot about her being taken care of as she grows old.*
- *Since I lived for ten years after college on my own and working full-time, it is difficult (but by no means too difficult) to ask for permission for things or sharing cars, etc., when I would have made my own schedule completely and done all tasks on my own. I like not having to do all tasks on my own now, and I realize that there are some trade-offs. I will miss certain things about the way my life was before, but I am grateful I can keep in contact with family and friends, and there are many things I now like better about this way of life!*
- *Being far away from my family, and the limited communication I have with them.*

- *Missing family, friends and adjusting to obedience and sacrificing the things I enjoyed in the world before entering.*
- *The community life is hard. I miss my family, and I miss the independence of being able to go out whenever and wherever I wanted. Being confined to one house, with people that you live and work and spend most every hour of the day with, is a kind of intensity that has no parallel in the lay world. It's easy to forget the spiritual and religious significance of this vocation when it's just part of your daily life.*
- *Submitting my will (obedience) 2) Keeping silence 3) Coping with being away from family while they have issues arise and realizing that my physical distance doesn't change that I can't fix anything outside of me.*
- *The distance and little communication with my immediate family.*

Appendix I: Questionnaire with Response Frequencies



**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Entrance Class of 2023**



This survey is designed to help us understand the characteristics and experiences of those entering religious life in the United States today and the religious institutes they are entering. "Religious institute" refers to the congregation, province, or abbey/monastery to which you belong. Please respond by marking an "X" in the appropriate box for each question below. If any question does not apply to you, please leave it blank. If you prefer completing this survey online, please visit <https://bit.ly/postulant23> using a login code included in CARA's invitation email.

Please use the responses below for questions 1-23.
1=Not at All **3=Somewhat**
2=Only a Little **4=Very Much**

Please much did the following attract you to religious life?

1	2	3	4	NR	
0	3	18	79	0	1. A sense of call to religious life
1	2	17	81	2	2. A desire for prayer and spiritual growth
2	8	30	61	2	3. A desire to be part of a community
1	7	29	64	3	4. A desire to be of service
4	12	34	51	2	5. A desire to be more committed to the Church

How much did these attract you to your religious institute?

1	2	3	4	NR	
11	18	33	37	3	6. The life and works of your founder/ress
1	3	19	77	0	7. The Charism of the institute
2	3	22	73	2	8. The mission of the institute
1	8	24	67	1	9. The spirituality of the institute
3	5	29	63	2	10. The prayer life of the institute
2	6	29	63	0	11. The community life of the institute
1	12	31	56	3	12. The ministries of the institute
8	4	20	69	1	13. The institute's fidelity to the Church
17	7	15	61	1	14. The institute's practice regarding a religious habit
11	23	40	27	5	15. The focus on the possibilities for the future of the institute
20	25	33	22	5	16. The size of the institute
26	24	29	21	5	17. The geographic location(s) of the institute
28	26	18	27	15	18. The institute's internationality, if applicable
5	5	24	67	1	19. The example of members of the institute
1	11	24	64	2	20. Welcome and encouragement by the institute's members
48	24	16	12	8	21. The racial/ethnic background of members
24	24	33	19	5	22. The ages of members
40	26	17	18	9	23. The cultural diversity of the members

How did you first become acquainted with your religious institute? *Check all that apply.*

- 23 24. Through a personal invitation by a member
- 25 25. In an institution where members served, e.g., school
- 12 26. Through working with a member of the institute
- 14 27. Through a relative or a friend in the institute
- 29 28. Through the recommendation of a friend or advisor
- 26 29. Through the reputation or history of the institute
- 6 30. Through a vocation fair
- 5 31. Through a vocation match or placement service
- 10 32. Through an event sponsored by the institute
- 10 33. Through a media story about the institute or member
- 29 34. Through your own search
- 4 35. Through print promotional materials
- 15 36. Through web or social media promotional materials
- 16 37. Other: _____

Please use the responses below for questions 38-50.

1=Not at All Helpful 3=Somewhat Helpful
2=Only a Little Helpful 4=Very Helpful
5=Not Applicable/Did not participate

*Please choose "5" if you did not participate. If you participated in any of the following **with your religious institute** before you entered, how helpful were these to you in discerning your call to your institute?*

1	2	3	4	NR	
0	2	14	84	2	38. Contact with the vocation director
1	6	20	74	7	39. Contact with institute members
0	0	0	4	91	40. "Andrew Dinner" or "Nun Run"
3	3	21	74	19	41. "Come and See" experience
1	1	23	75	43	42. Vocation or discernment retreat
3	3	8	85	49	43. Live-in experience
4	6	29	61	55	44. Ministry with institute members
6	10	29	55	72	45. Mission experience
4	22	27	47	58	46. Meeting with a discernment group
2	6	21	72	29	47. Visit(s) to local community/ies
5	1	10	84	47	48. Visit(s) to the Motherhouse
15	27	35	24	38	49. Social media (e.g., Facebook)
3	6	13	7	28	50. Spiritual direction

Please use the responses below for questions 51-63.

1=Not at All 3=Somewhat Important

2=Only a Little

4=Very Important

How important to you are these types of prayer?

1	2	3	4	NR	
0	2	11	87	2	51. Private personal prayer
1	3	6	91	1	52. Daily Eucharist
2	9	18	71	1	53. Liturgy of the Hours
13	25	36	27	1	54. Non-liturgical common prayer
15	26	28	32	2	55. Common meditation
3	6	9	82	1	56. Eucharistic Adoration
4	10	30	56	1	57. Other devotional prayer, e.g., rosary
9	21	33	37	3	58. Faith sharing

How important to you are these aspects of community life?

1	2	3	4	NR	
0	4	15	82	1	59. Living with other members
0	2	10	87	1	60. Praying with other members
0	9	28	62	1	61. Working with other members
0	4	17	79	1	62. Sharing meals together
1	5	20	74	1	63. Socializing/sharing leisure time together

Please use the responses below for questions 64-83.

1=Poor

3=Good

2=Fair

4=Excellent

How would you rate these in your religious institute?

1	2	3	4	NR	
2	8	32	57	3	64. Efforts to promote vocations
0	4	20	77	3	65. Welcome and support of newer members
1	4	23	71	5	66. Formation/incorporation programs
0	6	29	66	7	67. Opportunities for ongoing formation
0	6	19	75	5	68. Educational opportunities
4	5	31	61	5	69. Preparation for ministry
0	3	16	81	4	70. Opportunities for spiritual growth
0	4	18	79	5	71. Opportunities for personal growth
2	8	20	70	4	72. Sense of identity as religious
2	8	19	72	5	73. Sense of identity as institute members
2	5	21	71	4	74. Fidelity to the Church and its teachings
1	5	20	74	4	75. Faithfulness to prayer and spiritual growth
0	7	25	68	5	76. Focus on mission
0	4	24	72	5	77. Commitment to ministry
1	7	25	68	5	78. Response to the needs of our time
3	11	35	56	7	79. Efforts to promote social justice

1	5	38	57	4	80.	Quality of community life
1	5	31	57	5	81.	Communal prayer experiences
1	5	40	54	5	82.	Relationships with one another
7	17	36	3	5	83.	Diversity of cultures within the institute

84. Do members of your institute wear a habit?

76 Yes 24 No **NR=1**

84a. *If Yes to #84, is wearing the habit* **NR=24**

70 Required in all or most circumstances

24 Required only at certain times, e.g., ministry, prayer

6 Optional

0 Other: _____

84b. *If Yes to #84, and wearing the habit is optional, how many members wear it all or most of the time?*

13 None

NR=95

38 A few (less than 25%)

25 Some (25-49%)

13 Many (50-74%)

13 Most (75% or more)

84c. *If Yes to #84, and wearing the habit is optional, how frequently do you wear it?* **NR=97**

67 Never

0 Once in a while

17 Only at certain times (e.g., ministry, prayer)

17 in all or most circumstances

About You

85. Year you were born **AVG=1994 NR=1**

86. Age you first considered religious life **AVG=20 NR=2**

87. How many brothers and sisters do you have? **AVG=3 NR=1**

88. What is your birth order? **NR=1**

3 Only child 27 Youngest

37 Eldest 33 Somewhere in the middle

89. Are you: 47 Male 53 Female **NR=1**

89a. *If male, do you expect become a*

14 Perpetually professed brother

86 Priest

90. What is your first language? 2 **NR=2**

91. How many languages do you speak fluently?

69 One 24 Two 5 Three 2 Four or more **NR=2**

92. Were you employed before you entered?

85 Yes 15 No

92a. *If Yes to #92, were you employed?*

79 Full-time 21 Part-time **NR=15**

93. Were you in ministry before you entered?

53 Yes 47 No **NR=1**

93a. *If Yes to #93, were you engaged in ministry?*

Full-time 11 Part-time 57 Volunteer **NR=47**

94. What best describes your racial or ethnic background?

3 African/African American/black

9 Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian

68 Caucasian/European American/white

1 13 Hispanic/Latino(a)

0 Native American/American Indian

4 Mixed race

3 Other: _____

95. Were you born in the United States? 82 Yes 18 No **NR=1**

95a. *If No to #95, country of birth:*

95b. *If No to #95, year you first moved to United States:*

96. Were you raised Catholic? 86 Yes 14 No **NR=1**

96a. *If No to #96, did you become Catholic through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)?*

78 Yes 22 No **NR=87**

96b. *If No to #96, what was your prior religious affiliation:*

97. Were you ever home-schooled? 14 Yes 86 No

NR=1

97a. *If Yes to #97, number of years home-schooled:*

Did you attend any of the following before you entered? *Check all that apply.*

49 98. Parish-based religious education/CCD/PSR

46 99. Catholic elementary or middle school

38 100. Catholic high school

37 101. Catholic college or university

23 102. Catholic ministry formation program

38 103. Parish youth group or Life Teen during elementary or middle school years

116. What was the highest level of education you completed before you entered your religious institute?
- | | | | |
|----|---------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 5 | High school or less | 17 | Master's degree |
| 9 | Some college | 6 | Doctoral degree |
| 62 | Bachelor's degree | 1 | Other _____ NR=1 _____ |

Aside from parish-based religious education, did you ever participate in any of these before you entered? *Check all that apply. Check all that apply.*

- | | | |
|----|------|---|
| 31 | 104. | Campus ministry during high school years |
| 43 | 105. | Parish young adult group |
| 55 | 106. | Campus ministry during college |
| 9 | 107. | Religious institute volunteer program (e.g., Mercy Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps) |
| 59 | 108. | Liturgical ministry (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister) |
| 38 | 109. | Music ministry, cantor, choir |
| 42 | 110. | Faith formation, catechetical ministry, RCIA team |
| 57 | 111. | Other volunteer work in a parish or other setting |
| 67 | 112. | Retreats |
| 10 | 113. | World Youth Day |
| 10 | 114. | National Catholic Youth Conference |
| 39 | 115. | Right to Life March in Washington, DC |

Family Background While You Were Growing Up

117. Was your mother Catholic? 83 Yes 17 No **NR=1**
 117a. If No to #117, what was her religious preference? _____
118. How important was religion to your mother while you were growing up? **NR=1**
 6 Not at all 23 Somewhat important
 13 Only a little 58 Very important
119. Was your father Catholic? 82 Yes 18 No **NR=1**

119a. If No to #119, what was his religious preference?

120. _____
How important was religion to your father while you were growing up? **NR=2**
16 Not at all 29 Somewhat important
15 Only a little 41 Very important

Yes	No	NR		
27	73	2	121.	Do (did) you have a relative who is a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?
62	38	2	122.	Outside of family members, while you were growing up did you ever get to know a priest or a religious brother or sister/nun?
28	72	1	123.	Did your mother ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?
23	77	1	124.	Did your father ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?
25	75	2	125.	Did another family member ever speak to you about a vocation to priesthood or religious life?
52	48	2	126.	Overall, was starting a discussion with your family about your vocation easy for you?

127. Who raised you during the most formative part of your childhood? **Please select all that apply.**

96 Biological parent(s)
4 Other relative(s)
1 Step parent 2 Someone else
3 Adoptive parent(s)
2 I prefer not to answer
0 Grandparent(s)

- 127a. [If selected biological/step/adoptive parent(s)] During the most formative part of your childhood, were you raised by: (Please select one). **NR=3**

85 Married couple, living together
2 Married couple, living separately
0 Unmarried couple, living separately
2 Unmarried couple, living together
3 One parent, widowed
7 One parent, separated/divorced
0 One parent, single/unmarried
0 Something else
1 I prefer not to answer

Please use these responses for questions 128-139.

1=Not at All 3=Somewhat
2=Only a Little 4=Very Much
BLANK=Not applicable

How much encouragement did you receive from these when you first considered entering a religious institute?

1	2	3	4	NR	
5	6	19	70	5	121. Members of your institute
3	5	16	76	8	122. Vocation director/team
4	3	19	75	8	123. Spiritual director, if applicable
10	5	25	60	15	124. Other men and women religious
7	16	19	58	12	125. Diocesan priests
23	18	29	30	5	126. Your parents, if applicable
27	11	33	29	7	127. Your siblings, if applicable
27	22	32	20	12	128. Other family members
10	10	31	49	10	129. People in your parish
9	17	30	44	13	130. People in your school or workplace
33	5	25	37	54	131. Campus minister, if applicable
2	9	26	63	2	132. Friends outside the institute

140. What most attracted you to your religious institute?
141. What do you find most challenging about religious life?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University (CARA)

2300 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 400A, Washington, DC 20007

Phone: 202-687-8086 Fax: 202-687-8083

©2023, All Rights Reserved

Appendix II: Responses to Open-ended Comments

Q. 140: What most attracted you to your religious institute?

Presented here are the responses of the new entrants, slightly edited.

A deep yearning to be with the Lord in prayer and to serve him what most attracted me to my religious institute in particular was the way they lived out their Dominican charism and are faithful to the Traditions of the Church.

A serious spirituality. Worthy celebration at the Holy Mass Intense + joyful community life. Unity with the priest/ brothers of our religious family/ Love for the Eucharist + Mary.

A very clear sense of mission-working with the poor.

All of the time for prayer, especially in front of the Blessed Sacrament. We have an hour of silent Adoration every day. We also pray Liturgy of the Hours 4x per day, Lectio Divina for 30 minutes, Rosary, and Divine Mercy Chaplet every day. Those are set in stone times for prayer.

Applicable Spirituality, Charism of Mobility.

As someone with an international and business background, I liked that my religious institute had a variety of substantial-size ministries in different geographies worldwide.

Balance of Work prayer and Socializing.

Be a missionary.

Being with the poor and giving Christ to everyone.

Charism

Charism, internationality, ministry, size, spirituality, mission opportunity, community members.

Charism, 4 vows (Marian slavery) Joy and love of the cross. Faithful witness of the religious in living their vocation.

Charism, mission, spirituality, community life.

Common Liturgy of the Hours, intellectual life & academic formation, the kinds of ministries prioritized by the province, welcoming fraternal culture.

Community life and the charism of teaching truth.

Community Life and the charism of the Paulist Fathers.

Contemplative life, study, preaching mission.

Contemplative prayer, fraternity, and serving the poor.

Devotion to Mary and the Eucharist as well as an attention to liturgy for both office and mass. Orthodoxy to the faith as well as traditional learning among its members, as well as a clear zeal for pursuing truth and preaching the gospel for the salvation of souls. A sense of the cloister,

silence and the need for monastic clients. (life following the rule of St. Augustino): all these elements are vital to me in a healthy and moral religious life and the pursuit of charity for us mendicants.

Diversity and openness.

Fidelity to Church, rule and constitution. Good balance of monastic traditions, contemplation and apostolic work. Wearing of religious habit. Deep and authentic joy shown by members.

Formation, love of truth, missions in the most difficult places.

Franciscan Charism.

God

God

Having known several members of the religious institute and remained in contact with them over the past several years. Abbey is within reasonable driving distance of family. Mix of community members both young and old indicating it's not a dying religious institute.

History, Spirituality and Ministry.

I am disabled and knew my choices would be fewer than my non-disabled counterparts, so I was transparent about my accessibility needs with every community I visited. I loved that this order had always allowed for disabled women to join. I also felt very welcomed, and my vocations director answered all of my questions on accessibility right away. I felt very at home here.

I am most attracted to the Charism of my order.

I did not seek religious life out for myself nor did I ever think I would consider entering a convent, but God directed me here through His mysterious providence. I felt God's call after I attended a high school retreat at this religious institute, and then I attended the come and see a few months following it. In other words, God's call is what attracted me the most. It's where I experienced His love most powerfully and felt most at peace within my heart compared to any other place.

I felt a strong sense of belonging or feeling "at home." I felt natural being with the Sisters and got along with them easily. They are very joyful and filled with laughter. They are supportive of one another. I loved their history with St. Alphonsus, as I have loved St. Alphonsus for much of my life. It just felt right.

I felt at home whenever I visited our community. Walking with the vocations director I became more fully myself over time and saw that our community was full of women I felt safe to make mistakes around. The thing that attracted me most was moments of prayer where Jesus invited me to take a next step.

I felt invited by God to apply and try this out, especially through people in my life. I knew prayer and community would only enrich any ministries in which I was serving. I wanted to be as

faithful to the Gospel as I could, while still joining a group that would push me to serve in a way that fit who I was and my gifts. I was also attracted to an abbey, to committing to a particular place and group of people.

I found a bunch of amazing women and I wanted to share life and ministry with them.

I graduated from college in 2013, the year Pope Francis was elected, and so I kind of loosely understood that a Jesuit was a religious order (we have no Jesuit presence in the area in which I grew up). I really appreciated what he was writing and what messages he was sending. Then, I started reading America magazine (I don't exactly remember when or how), but I also became really appreciative of the work Fr. James Martin, SJ, was doing following the Pulse nightclub mass shooting. It was nice to hear from religious leaders while many others remained quieter. His life experience was also similar to mine in that I was working for some years after college and became drawn to what could be a "better" way of life in community with others.

I have always been inspired by the work of the Jesuits. I attended a Jesuit University and fell in love with their service and mission.

I honestly was discerning with two other religious institute before considering the religious institute I belong to know. I went on "come and see" on a whom with my religious institute only because I could not make the spiritual exercise at this point of my discernment. Jesus spoke very clearly and I heard him calling me, "to be his Bride," in this religious institute I belong. The Charism, life of prayer, spirituality- I had little knowledge of this prior to entering. But it was his call that I heard, and made it happen.

I originally discerned being a diocesan priest, so the clerical nature of the Dominicans greatly interested me since I really felt called to the priesthood. I love the Dominicans commitment to truth, defending orthodoxy and preaching for the salvation of souls and they still wear the habit and chant the office in common.

I sort of fell into teaching at one of their schools after college, and in getting to know the sisters at school I realized that this is where I was called. It was mostly in teaching with them, but also, I thought religious life was closed to me because of some serious dietary restrictions I have, and one of the sisters I taught with, has the same issue, which made me realize that maybe it wasn't something totally closed to me. Then I visited and entirely fell in love with the way they pray the Office :)

I want to give my life for God. To grow deeper in my prayers. Praying for the church, religious and others. To become one with our Lord.

I want to live a life totally committed to God---to make of my life a wholly burnt offering to Him. And out of that commitment to God, to serve His people. I was attracted to the Dominicans because of their orthodoxy to Church teachings, communal prayer, fraternal life, emphasis on study (the spirituality of study), and wearing of the habit.

I was attracted by the charism of my religious institute and by their zeal for ministry and community life. Also, I was attracted to them since they are attracting other vocations and are not dying out.

I was attracted by the members and their mature, life-giving spirituality.

I was attracted by the opportunity to continue to pursue an intellectual life and teach in a young community.

I was attracted by the personal witness of several religious, and helped to discern and get to know the institute especially by spiritual direction. The opportunities for growth and service through a whole life devoted to prayer, study, community living, and ministry continues to draw me.

I was attracted to the patrimony of the Order and the relevance of it's charism and mission to today's needs.

I was initially attracted to our congregation because of its connections to the religious family that formed me in College and left a big impact on me. As I continued to discern, I was then attracted by the way our patron and how her life and witness as a Virgin Martyr affects how we live our apostolate and our lives as brides of Christ. I was struck by the fact that everything in our life is done first in response to our identity as brides of Christ.

I was most attracted by the charisms of the Order, but also the joy that was present within the community. I loved how the Sisters really seemed like a family, but everything was aimed towards the purpose of growing in relationship with the Lord and uniting ourselves more fully to Him. There was not just one thing that attracted me to the Dominican Sisters, but I feel like these are some of the more important aspects.

I was most attracted by the fidelity and piety of some of the members I had grown up with. I saw in the Society of Jesus a pathway to God which my heart latched on to. The history of the order was greatly attractive and seeing how the things done from St Ignatius time are still done today.

I was most attracted by the hope of helping souls lead fuller lives in Christ than what our technological society offers in this place. My institute forms men to be able to intellectually counter the philosophies that are current, and I hope to be a sign of the Answer by my way of life.

I was most attracted to the blending of monastic customs with an active apostolate, silence, chanting of the Divine office, and the full use of the habit.

I was most attracted to the Charism the reverence I witnessed and experienced on visits (reverence for the exharist for one another , for every person they encounter) and to the community life (praying together sharing meals together, always together in mission recreating together)

I was most attracted to the life of the founder, and I was attracted to the way he followed God. I was also attracted to the community life of the order.

Inclusive culture and a deep spirituality

Initially, it was the intentionality of the life, in particular the abundant way the charism is been out in the whole of the life. At document continued, the joy of the members and the contemplative aspects of the life continued to attract me most. Their love of the church has also continued to draw and more me.

Its simplicity: it seemed to be faithful to the roots of monastic life and to be all about loving God through the practice of the evangelical counsels. It seemed to be neither trying to be modern or attractive to current tastes, nor to be "traditional" for the sake of going against the grain. It seemed to be ever ancient, ever new because of its deep roots and total focus on God. This is what I perceived in the sisters I met and during my visits.

Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament

Joy of members - Orthodoxy in matters of faith, morals and liturgy - Academic inclination of institute - Evangelical mission of institute.

joyful witness of the Sisters and their evident real love for Jesus

Liturgy of the Hours, Perpetual Adoration, & Making Altar Bread

Mercy and union and charity. The fact that prayer is the most important and then our community life. From these two skzong pánts do we go out to do out to do our apostolate. Wearing a habit and living a more family style religious life.

Mission

Mission to preach and teach, Young vocations, Wearing of habits, Prayerful mass and liturgy,

Missionary charism and the example of priests a met

My communities fidelity to the church and their community life. They were so happy. It made me happy.

Originally the apostolic work attracted me most, specifically in health care. After my visits to the mother house, the example of the sisters and the Charism of the institute attached me. I am also very attracted by the institute's fidelity to the church and in authentically living out religious life.

Q. 141: What do you find most challenging about religious life?

The following is a presentation of the responses of new entrants on what they find challenging about religious life. Slight editing has been done. Their responses include:

A tie between my sisters (living with people is always difficult, no matter how much you like or love them) and just being a postulant - going from being a working adult with a job and a car and a master's degree in leadership positions at school to not being allowed to refill the snacks in the kitchenette by virtue of being a postulant is a rough transition sometimes.

Accepting my own spiritual poverty and allowing myself to be loved by Christ through my sisters.

Accepting my own spiritual poverty.

Accepting the imperfections of my brothers. When discerning to make a commitment to live a holy life there are many who do but unfortunately as I look to the whole order there are some religious in my own community who say and live in a way contrary to what the Church teaches which is very difficult to understand. How and Why? We can only pray for the continual purification of the church and of the order. Sanctity is something that is lived out not preached.

Adjusting to a life of obedience rather than being able to have control over my day

Adjusting to being obedient and having to go to two different culture shocks.

Adjusting to communal life and learning how to be open with myself/superiors/brothers. Additionally, being away from home permanently.

Adjusting to minimal contact with my family, learning to become part of the community, and to "feel at home."

Allowing the Lord to love me, form me, heal me and draw me deeper into relationship with him every single day.

As from different background , everything was new to me , culture , food and way of life . But I am enjoying the prayer and community life of the older.

Balancing prayer like and other obligations . Living in the moment while information . Learning to be intimate in different ways.

Being aware of my unworthiness to live it, to adore the Lord in Eucharistic Adoration, how small and weak my prayer is Having to confront how my weaknesses (i.e. in communication, being overly sensitive) harm other sisters and the community life as a whole/. Seeing the impact of my sins and selfishness.

Being away from my family and friends who I left back at home.

Being away from my home country, family and friend

Being away know family. So many different personalities. Also , I actually enter postulancy today 01-08-24

Being far away from my family, and the limited communication I have with them.

Being really available and present in community.

Being subject to a superior in the vow of obedience. The vow of celibacy and never getting married and having a family. Being away from family and friends, missing them and also worrying that they will be alright without me, especially my mother; I worry a lot about her being taken care of as she grows old.

Bernard says man's initial alienation is from himself. The biggest challenge to me is reconciling regrets, wounds, sins, and frustrating patterns of my own behavior with God's superabundant mercy and His call to convert my life.

By God's grace , I do not find anything challenging because I am able to do everything I need with his help. May God bless you .

Choir practice.

Choosing to acknowledge my weaknesses. It has only been possible because I feel safe letting my superiors see when I feel weak and broken. That hasn't made it easy, it is still hard, but its what actually makes it possible.

Clarity of my own weakness + imperfections, discovering more my flaws/ sinfulness especially come to light in community life.

Coexistence. Seeing extremely "effeminate" seminarians and priests and no one saying anything about it is complicate to my to understand. Something is wrong here.

Community and keeping the vows (obedience, chastity, and poverty)

Community Differences

community life

Community life

Community life

Community life

Community life

Community life and obedience- learning now to live both well now. . I'm 48 years old and lived on my own for the past 20 years.

Community life.

Community, self-awareness

Complete indifference...being engaged in the world but not of the world

Conflicts between members of the community. Gossip and animosity between members.

confronting pride and our own sense of sinfulness. growing to love a new community and all its members regardless of their personality type. But these things ultimately allow the power and glory of the Incarnation to shine forth more robustly. If we were not sinners Christ would not have had to come.

Continuing to discern when God is calling me to walk with my sisters in formation and when He is just walking with me alone for some parts. Handling my family's reaction is also incredibly difficult.

Cultivating and fasting a deep and intentional spiritual /prayer life when constantly surrounded by distractions especially tech distractions , tv, phone, computer, gaming devizes .

Dealing with a great diversity of opinions and practices inside community life. I struggle with inconsistent styles of worship, even though it is all rooted in a love for Christ.

Dealing with the process of infinite unknowns.

Developing a hidden life with God, Getting used to foreign culture

Fighting the temptation to take on too many responsibilities, both in ministry and within the formation house / institute.

Finding the right balance of how to relate and communicate to my family and friends outside of religious life

For me it is giving up old things like playing video games , listening to music, watching movies whenever I want . The hardest part is surrendered your our will to the will of another.

Giving up family life .

Giving up marriage; it is a big sacrifice, but Christ's grace makes us able to do it, and to do it joyfully.

God has granted with many graces in my formation and I have been grateful to bam humility. What I found hard at first was feeling small and being unable to do things perfectly. I often be come discouraged when I'm corrected or things don't go right, but in the end God fortifies me and leads on because I have come and live to love Jesus.

Growing in obedience and learning to surrender my will to the Father's will, doing what's asked of me even if I don't want to do it. Also, learning to live with others from various backgrounds.

Having to surrender my independence in areas such as choosing How I spend my time and who I spend it with and diet /food optiens.

Homesickness

I am already ordained, so the most challenging aspect for me is learning how the religious identity differs from the diocesan identity.

I find loneliness to be a big struggle with religious life and trying to develop deep friendships with the other guys that can sustain me in this life

I find obedience and dialogue with my superiors to be the most challenging at this time.

I find separation from family and friends to be the most challenging part of postulancy.

I find the balancing of everything most challenging. Between community life, personal prayer, and study, it can take a lot of management. At the same time, all of these aspects have helped me to grow in knowledge of myself and of the Lord, and these things have helped me to understand and appreciate the gifts that the Lord has blessed me with.

I find the centrality of the relationship with God challenging, because my life before was more diffuse and my relationship with God was more mediated by others. To grow emotionally and spiritually looks different now that I am no longer a layperson and it's an interesting transition.

I find the greatly increased separation from friends and especially family members to be the most challenging part .

I find the separation from and lack of communication with family and outside friends most challenging.

I find the uncertainty about the future with the declining membership very challenging.

I have found it most difficult to be away from my friends. I had very close relationships with my friends and community in Grand Rapids, Michigan before coming here. They were like my family. And now, I can only write letters and emails to them once a month.

I have found that it has been challenging to connect with certain brothers whose personalities are very different from mine.

I left due to the heterodoxy of my superiors., Although I am a conservative man, I didn't want to pick an order on the basis of ideological comfort and I entered an order with a reputation for being progressive. It became an issue when I realized I was vowing obedience to men who didn't agree with the Church.

I'm a novice so just adjusting to community life and my time being less and less my own and difficulty finding ways to relax.

Inviting my family members in to the sacrifices and trusting . They will receive deeply through this , in Gods time, encountering my own faults + weaknesses in "Canmore " life / honestly, receiving this radical ABUNDANCE of love is so challenging and yet so beautiful

It depends on the day. Sometimes, it is staying faithful to the healthy journey naturally in place by the nature of religious life. Other days, it is balancing relationships through difficulties. Somedays it is constancy in prayer life. Every once in a while, it is choosing obedience when it makes no sense other than for growth in the virtue. In the beginning and periodically throughout the year it is the separation from family, friends, or life in the world.

It is challenging to leave family and learn to obey.

It is difficult managing all the expectations and time management, while still finding time to unwind to serve better. As an introvert, it can be hard to find time and space to recharge properly or to manage stress. The relationship required with my formation director can be a little overwhelming at times, as there isn't a comparable type of relationship outside of religious life.

It's okay so far

It's challenging learning how to be a good family member and friend with less finesse and ability to connect with those outside the community but Jesus is so faithful and He is worth it !

Joining a community at the age of 33 after having worked in the professional world for 10 years with mostly people who are fresh out of college took some adjustment.

Lack of racial diversity. It feels as if my order does not find it valuable to minister to black people. When I have inquired as to why we do not minister to or incorporate the traditions of the black catholic church, the response is always "we dont know how" or "we find it too difficult"; however, we dedicate significant resources to the latino community. As a black man, I do not feel seen or valued. I too have a soul.

Learning how best to live in community, especially with those who have very different habits in life.

Learning to navigate different personalities and temperaments - particularly being in formation , being directed by a sister who may be the complete opposite of your personality/ temperaments knowing how to balance these so that I continue growing and my sister always know I love them .

Learning to surrender my own will and preferences in order to live out obedience.

Leaving or setting aside the "goods" of what I had before entering (family involvement, relationships, hobbies, friendships in ministry, etc.)

Letting go of who I was in my previous chapter of life to learn more about becoming a woman religious, including making a salary, being close to family with a freer schedule, and being responsible only to myself.

Little free time to decompress

Living in community , making the effort to really pray.

Living in community (but this is also a grace)

Living in community can be challenging and there are differences in opinion about the direction the Church should be moving and the direction the community will take in the future.

Living in community has its challenges . It teaches you more about who you are . Thought challenging it is possible , with grace to overcome .

Living in community with sisters from all backgrounds especially since I never lived with females growing up.

Living out the detachment that the counsels ask of you

living the vows of religious life

Living the vows.

Living with many different personalities and temperaments.

Maintaining balance between prayer, chores, ministry, class work, and personal studies.

Maintaining focus on both practical preparation (through ministry and education) and spiritual formation (in prayer and spiritual direction) at the same time.

Maintaining fraternal charity.

Missing family, friends and adjusting to obedience and sacrificing the things I enjoyed in the world before entering.

My greatest difficulty is letting go of my own independence which I had cultivated before entering.

My time not being my own.

No longer being able to dispose of my own time

Not allowing the life to become routine; constantly having to stir the heart to go deeper.

Not being able to support and be with family and friends physically.

Not being as available to friends and family

Not everyone in religious life is immediately holy. Some guys have a hard time getting along with each other and tend to bicker a lot. It can be difficult to surrender my will to God in that.

Not growing up around any religious made it difficult to discern / imagine what a religious vocation look like . And even still there are challenges with surrendering what I thought my life may look like.

Novitiate year

Obedience

One of the most challenging aspects of religious life can be balancing the demands of living a life of prayer, service, and community with the pressures and distractions of the modern world. Maintaining a deep spiritual life, staying committed to vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and navigating the complexities of interpersonal relationships within the religious community can also pose significant challenges.

One of the most challenging aspects of religious life is practicing and living out the evangelical counsels as a community. Chastity implies, in the context of religious life, a detachment from sisters even to the extent of not being able to establish a close friendship like that outside the convent. As for poverty, it can be difficult to accept that what we may usually claim as our personal property is considered the whole community's (except for certain items that are not meant for the whole community such as personal medication or hygiene products). Moreover, it also entails spiritual poverty that goes hand in hand with chastity, which is detachment from sisters that are especially easy to relate to and become friends with. Last but not least, obedience is a demanding counsel and virtue to follow as it requires a great deal of self-denial and sacrifice of my personal will to those in authority. Other than the evangelical counsels is balancing time between prayer, study, community, for all these three are necessary for the spiritual and social growth, and requires self-discipline, prudence, and patience in learning to time manage.

People who come from abusive households and do not have an outlet or find ways to heal.

perseverance in desolation, purification of my soul, healing process

Personal growth while in formation

Regularity in my prayer and preparation of the different tasks by the formation program

Relationships before entering.

Religious life is so counter cultural , so it is a huge adjustment .It is also challenging to encounter all off our wounds word weaknesses, but it is a great gift to do it is a place when one is utterly supported to heal and grow.

Separation from family .

Separation from Family & Friends from previous life

Separation from the world

Since I have worked for several years already as an ordained minister and have a background in formation myself, being docile to a new model of formation is very important but also challenging. The adjustment to poverty and community life, while remarkable source of freedom and grace, are also challenging. As a diocesan priest, I could enjoy more "independence" than in the life of religion.

Since I lived for ten years after college on my own and working full-time, it is difficult (but by no means too difficult) to ask for permission for things or sharing cars, etc., when I would have made my own schedule completely and done all tasks on my own. I like not having to do all tasks on my own now, and I realize that there are some trade-offs. I will miss certain things about the way my life was before, but I am grateful I can keep in contact with family and friends, and there are many things I now like better about this way of life!

So far, dealing with other members' quirks and imperfections.

Some aspects of community life --> learning to live with and love those very different than me.

Some challenging or unexpected part about religious life for me is that every brother has different habits and individual behaviors that cause some troubles between us, but nothing difficult to solve. Personally, the most challenging to me is the language, to learn English is demanded and stressful.

some part of the formation could be challenging.

Staying faithful to the observance of obedience and learning that God's Love is present in all the corrections and disciplines given by my formator/superior.

Strengthening the will.

Submitting my will (obedience) 2) Keeping silence 3) Coping with being away from family while they have issues arise and realizing that my physical distance doesn't change that I can't fix anything outside of me

Surrendering all that I have and am, including my will. Learning obedience and growing to be obedient in loving my sisters and superiors.

Talking useful advantage of the time given for study, prep apostolate, etc. We have plentiful time but organizing myself determining what I want to use it for, getting everything I need, etc, is most challenging.

Temptations (corporeal and vow related)

That there is a large age gap in my community, not a lot of young women around make it very difficult in many aspects socially, emotionally, with communication, and being understood. Internally is letting of independence and a large loss of autonomy since one has to begin depending on superiors for permission on everything. As well as loss of communication with loved ones is challenging.

The adjustment to a life without technology and limited contact with the outside world, friends and family one of the hardest things, especially having grown up immersed in technology as a kid and relying on these comforts-even it not intrinsically sinful that I

may rely on God alone in a way I haven't been asked to before . Entering in to an exclusive "sparsal" identity with God has been the biggest charge and this challenge.

The Charism of the Order

The communal life

The community life is hard. I miss my family, and I miss the independence of being able to go out whenever and wherever I wanted. Being confined to one house, with people that you live and work and spend most every hour of the day with, is a kind of intensity that has no parallel in the lay world. It's easy to forget the spiritual and religious significance of this vocation when it's just part of your daily life.

the community life, the people...very different interpretations of faith

The daily surrender and obedience to my fellow members of the community.

The demands of community life and poverty of time.

The distance and little communication with my immediate family.

The humility of being a novice.

The lack of diversity. This has made spiritual direction a bit difficult.

The letting go of control and learning to obey.

the many details of daily life

The most challenging aspect of religious life is the daily surrender to Gods . Letting go it your own will . And trey doing both of those thing multiple times a day.

The most challenging aspect of religious life is the surrender required to follow jesus more closely and choosing poverty chastity and obedience, we surrender our whole hearts wills live it is simultaneously the most freeing and challenging part-to give up everything and everyone, to leave the whole world behide. it has left my hands copleately empty, open to receive jesus more fully, it reguiles an extremely deep awareness and self-knowledge so that if know what makes me reach for other things. This surrender has been the most challenging and most fulfilling aspect of religious life for me.

The most challenging has been detachment from the world. I am blessed with amazing family and friends and although . I know those friendships will always be there they will look different now . But God provide the grace.

The most challenging part about religious life so far is the interior purification process. There is a lot of baggage and wounds I have carried with me into religious life, and confronting these wounds and cooperating with God is all part of the healing process. In the outside world, there are many distractions so that we do not have to face our wounds. In religious life, however, we are so attuned and present to interior movements that we

must face ourselves courageously and humbly before God. Although this is the most challenging part, it is also leading me towards a path of great healing.

The most challenging part of the religious life is understanding and accepting certain practices I'm not used to.

The most challenging thing about religious life is the inner battle of satisfying myself and following Christ. His will must reign in my heart.

The most challenging thing has been finding a balance between personal and communal expectations.

The most challenging things are the sacrifices I have to make on a daily basis - giving up what I want to do and staying obedient to the schedule given to me. Some days, I very much want to read for 2 hrs, but that's not possible 95% of the time, so it's the little acts of dying to myself (and still remaining joyful and peaceful) that provide the most challenge for me internally.

The number of things that seem to stuck in the past without indications of updating and requirements to get consensus on most decisions when things could much more easily be progressed if a select group could decide and move forward.

The old-school "offer it up" and blind obedience mentality that pervades formation. I really thought religious institutes would have better psychology in this day and age.

The small sacrifices - not having my normal face wash , not eating snacks, obedience in the laundry -not washing my white personal laundry with the white habits, waking up at 5:15 am , homesickness.

The stripping and leaving behind of live the " old man" and worldly tendencies. I've groom use to . Through the gift of understanding. Thẽ seen how the Lord is allowing me to see my weaknesses (which is a challenge) but also in this , to encounter his Merry more and more . There is much joy in the cross.

The tensions of living in community.

The transition from secular studies/work and being in a relationship to a life ordered by the vows, and an uncertain future, continues to involve some letting go and discovering a new identity and trust in God.

There for , the distance from family and the limited communication has been a difficult thing to grow into. I've also found it difficult to adjust away from " Unscheduled " free time I grew at moments the detailed human has been difficult.

To always face onself with truth and courage relentlessly.

Trusting in God. I am immersed in the mysteries of the faith all day every day, which is what I desired upon entering, but it brings out deep-seated doubts I didn't know I had. Being a convert likely has to do with it.

Trying to understanding different personalities in the community

Unique path since I am entering later in life; not entering with other postulants in the same community.

With any vocation comes its challenges, but what I would say is most difficult was (and is) surrendering my independence and will completely to God through my superiors. Obedience is something that the world has completely devalued, and something I have never known the meaning and beauty of until I entered Religious Life. It is the most challenging thing, but also by far the most rewarding.